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System of Divinity,

I N

A COURSE of SERMONS,

O N T H E

Being, Nature, and Attributes of GOD;

On some of the most important ARTICLES of

The Christian Religion, in Connection;

A N D

On the several VIRTUES and VICES of MANKIND.

In SIX VOLUMES.

By the REV. WILLIAM DAVY, A. B.

MORETONHAMPSTEAD, DEVON.

"SPARSA COEGI."

V O L. I.

E X E T E R:

Printed for the Author by R. TREWMAN; sold also by G. and
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Booksellers in Town and Country. M.DCC.LXXXV.

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P R E F A C E.

IN Days of polite Literature, when Science in all its branches is brought as near as possible to perfection, and almost every subject is exhausted by Authors of the first eminence, it may be esteemed, perhaps, somewhat of a rash undertaking to think of adding any thing either to instruct or entertain.

How far the following sheets may justify their appearance under these circumstances, is not for the Author to determine.

It may be some apology, however, when it is confessed, that he would not be thought so assuming as to pretend to advance any new doctrines, having been cautious not to produce any thing but what hath been already approved by good authority: His chief aim is to represent the fundamentals of our religion the same by his explication, as they have always been represented to be, by others the most judicious expositors, whom therefore he hath made his teachers,

being in no way ambitious to say new things, but only carefully to enforce, in a more useful way, old truths, and to bring together, in one body, the detached works of the best authors; that what hath hitherto been the entertainment of a few only, might be set forth for the benefit of the world at large; and every one be supplied with a System of practical Divinity, in every way suited to the advancement of family devotion.

As volumes of sermons, therefore; and *Systems of Divinity* have appeared in public, and have been as readily received under the confessed title of other men's labours, it was thought that a compilation, made from the best sense of different authors on the same subjects, properly connected, with improvements, might be more serviceable than the confined sentiments of one author only. However,

Where a number of authors were not to be had on any subject; or one appeared in every respect preferable to all others, he hath thankfully made the best use of that single help, save only in abridgement.

He

P R E F A C E.

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He is fully sensible that a charge of injustice will here be laid against him, in not affixing the authors names as separately collected.

The reason of this omission is, (besides the prolixity of the task) that this work was first collected for a private, not public use, and designed only for common service.— Besides,

To many of these Compositions it would be difficult to assign any particular author, for, meeting with the same sense differently expressed by different authors; he hath often taken the liberty to gather from each what appeared best, and formed it into one.

There are many good authors who have confessed that "they have drank deep of "the stream of other men's labours;" and it may be said (with great propriety) that the most useful way of writing (except for those of the highest abilities) doth not now so much consist in elaborate productions of their own, as in proper compilations, with improvements, from other men's labours; in so adjusting the perfections of others,

that they may appear one uniform work of their own, for the benefit of the whole.

The observation of the wise man will hold even at this time, “there is nothing “new under the sun.”

Every subject is minutely canvassed, and which therefore should always be consulted previous to our compositions, for the improvement of our ideas, and the refinement of our discourses.

It will be no disparagement, 'tis presumed, to the productions of any author, that they are here more or less made use of for the benefit and embellishment of the work.

The subjects here treated of must be acknowledged to be of the greatest importance.

The Being and Nature of God, the grounds and reasons of our duty, together with the just exposure of sin, and the due recommendation of virtue, in all their branches; these are matters in which no one ought to be ignorant, and the connected manner in which they are treated, surely cannot take from, but must add to their

their usefulness, and make them more significant.

“ As to their preaching (saith a sensible
“ Divine) I could wish they would make their
“ discourses more systematical and con-
“ nected one with another : I know by ex-
“ perience that a man may preach for seven
“ years together, in the common way, in
“ unconnected sermons, and our people be
“ never the wiser. But a set of plain regu-
“ lar discourses upon the Being, Attributes,
“ and moral Government of God ; and the
“ peculiar doctrines and duties of the Gos-
“ pel: Such a system repeated once or twice
“ a year, would teach the people their duty,
“ and make them more willingly attend the
“ church.”

It was some sensible pleasure to the com-
piler, after he had formed the following
design, and ranged his discourses in order,
to be confirmed in his sentiments by the
perusal of the above.

There is indeed an obvious difficulty in
these undertakings, and an almost certain as-
surance of not being able to secure the plea-
sure

sure and attention of the reader thro' the whole of them.

The man who selects from his works the best of his performances, cannot fail of obtaining the character of a pleasing writer; whilst he who conducts his reader through every intermediate discourse, must in some places be less profitable, and of course less entertaining.

The candid reader, therefore, will make favourable allowances for subjects and seasons, and (like a wise "Repairer") supply from his own sufficiency every defect in the present undertaking.

As to the vindication of the two first volumes, on the Being, Nature, and Perfections of God, we have a remarkable passage in Dr. Jortin's sermons, vol. I. page 193.

"It were to be wished that men not only,
"believed in God, but believed in him
"upon good grounds, that they were able
"to give a reason of their faith, and were
"in no danger of being seduced by the
"cavils of prophane persons; and therefore
"discourses which may furnish them with
"this kind of knowledge, cannot be impro-
"per."

"per or unnecessary." And a little further on, he adds,

"Many mean conceptions, many false doctrines, many pernicious errors have prevailed concerning the Nature and Perfections of God; and what hath been may be again: for which reason it is expedient to caution men that they fall not in the like mistakes; and by shewing men what follies and absurdities the human understanding is capable of embracing, to make them industrious in cultivating their own, and thankful for the light which Revelation and the Gospel hath given in this, and all other Moral Subjects."

"There are also persons who always want instruction or admonition upon this head; through ignorance, superstition, prejudice, or vicious dispositions, they receive and entertain many wrong notions of the Nature of God." In another place he says,

"Without a due knowledge of God, it will be impossible to avoid the guilt with which the Samaritans were condemned, of worshipping we know not what; even a fancy and vain imagination of our own

"shaping

" shaping instead of the true God, perhaps
" no more representing his infinite Perfec-
" tions and Excellencies than those dumb
" Idols which the Heathens worshiped;
" whereof our adoration will be but super-
" stition, and ourselves idolaters." Add to
this,

And what will make Discourses on these Subjects still more necessary, and of greater advantage than others of a more common and vague import, is, that at the same time they instruct us in the most high and important knowledge, they also give, by way of inference, every article of Faith, every comfort of Hope, and every precept of Charity.

They enforce the whole line of our conduct, whether it be to God, to Ourselves, or to our Brethren around us; at the same time that they are the sole "anchor of our hope," they are the "whole duty of man."

As to the Connection, in the third volume, see the 7th page of this Preface.—And then,

As to those Invectives against Sin, and Incentives to Virtue, in the three last volumes,

AND LIVID CRIMES AND VICES THERE

there is as remarkable a passage in the forty-second Sermon of Archbishop Tillotson :

“ General persuasives to repentance and a good life, and invectives against sin and wickedness at large, are certainly of good use to recommend religion and virtue, and to expose the deformity and danger of a vicious course:—But,

“ It must be acknowledged (on the other hand) that these General Discourses do not so immediately tend to reform the lives of men; because they fall among the croud, and do not touch the consciences of particular persons in so sensible and awaking a manner as when we treat of particular duties and sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and to reclaim them from the other, by proper arguments taken from the word of God, and from the nature of particular virtues and vices.

“ The general way is, as if a Physician, instead of applying particular remedies to the distemper of his Patient, should entertain him with a long discourse of diseases in general, and of the pleasure and advan-

“ tage

“ tage of health, and earnestly persuade him
“ to be well, without taking his particular
“ disease into consideration, and prescribing
“ remedies for it. But,

“ If we would effectually reform men, we
“ must take to task the great and common
“ disorders of their lives ; and represent their
“ faults to them in such a manner as may
“ convince them of the evil and danger of
“ them, and put them upon the endeavour
“ of a cure.”

Thus far this great man :—surely then no fault will be found in the design, whatever defect may be seen in the execution.

It is hoped therefore, that what through these volumes is plainly laid down, will be carefully and particularly attended to by all; especially by those who are in charge over the rising generation, that they may be wise and keep themselves from sin, and so become an honour and ornament to succeeding generations ; “ to the intent that when they come up they may teach their children the same ;” that both we and they may reap the advantage of it through perpetual and everlasting ages.

S E R M O N S

On the BEING, NATURE,

A N D

ATTRIBUTES of GOD.

"And they shall not teach every Man his Neigh-
"bour, and every Man his Brother, saying, Know
"the Lord; for all shall know him from the least to
"the greatest." — HEB. viii. 11.

ЗИОМЯГА
ДЛЯ ИДЕИ ОБЩЕСТВА
БИЛ

СОДЕЙСТВИЕ БОГА ВО МЯСЕ

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SERMON I.

SERMON I.

That there is a God, and how to conceive of him.

HEB. xi. 6. “*He that cometh to God, must believe that he is.*”

AS we live in an age so profane and sceptical, as to call in question the most universally received principles both of reason and religion; in an age wherein the Being and Perfections of God, the Creator, are even called in question by creatures of an inferior order, and the works of his own hand: As the bold cavils of perverse men, and their unreasonableness are such, as to oblige us to prove and defend those principles, which can scarce be made plainer than they are of themselves: An attempt to set forth the Being and Nature of God, with the duties flowing from thence, can by no means be improper or unseasonable.

VOL. I.

B

From

From the words before us, therefore, I shall take occasion,

First, To shew that there is a God; for “he that cometh to God, must believe that ‘he is.’”—And then,

Secondly, How we are to conceive of him; for “he that cometh to God, must not only ‘believe that he is,’ but also that ‘he is such an one as he hath revealed himself to be.’”

Concluding with such inferences as shall flow from the same.

First, That there is a God. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is.

That there is a God may be proved these two ways:

First, From natural light or reason; and

Secondly, From universal tradition, and written history, whether sacred or profane; and

First, That there is a God, is evident from natural light or reason. The first thing to be believed is the existence of God; so runs out Creed, it being the fundamental doctrine of all religion, and necessary to be believed by all that approach to please him. A truth this so bright, that nothing but carnality, which obscures reason, ever sought to extinguish.

While we admire the wit and the wisdom of many worthies in the heathen world, we are astonished

astonished to observe that deep ignorance and blindness, which reigned almost universally amongst them, respecting the great Lord of the Universe, the Creator and Ruler of all things ; the very view of whose stupendous works (we reasonably think) is sufficient to lead us to the knowledge of him, is sufficient to inform us of the exceeding power and wisdom of the work-master. But, alas ! this was the case with a small number of them only ; with only a little company of the rarer sort, selected one by one, from different nations, and in different ages, while of the generality St. Paul's declaration is evidently true, viz. that "they became vain " in their imaginations, and their foolish heart " was darkened, professing themselves wise they " became fools ;" men necessarily becoming very fools, before they can find in their hearts to say or think " there is no God." —For

" The invisible things of him from the beginning of the Creation are (as the Apostle argues) clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, so that we are without excuse."

The matter is so plain to us, in our present state, so manifest is the Deity in his Creation to our understanding, that we are at a loss to account for this darkness in men, who were cer-

SERMON I.

tainly endowed with sagacity and sense equal to our own, and are obliged to join the son of Sirach in his fine reasoning on the topic.

“ Surely vain are all men, by nature, who
“ are ignorant of God, and could not, out of
“ the good things that are seen, know him
“ that is; neither by considering the works,
“ did they acknowledge the work-master; but
“ deemed” other things “ to be the Gods
“ which govern the world, with whose beauty,
“ if they being delighted, took them to be
“ Gods, let them know how much better the
“ Lord of them is; for, the first author of
“ beauty hath created them. But, if they were,
“ astonished at their power and virtue, let them
“ understand by them how much mightier he
“ is who made them. For, by the greatness
“ and beauty of the creatures proportionably
“ the maker of them is seen.”

There is hardly any thing in nature from whence the certainty of the Being of God may not justly and reasonably be deduced.

It would be tedious to repeat at length upon this head a great number of arguments among Christians, to whom they have been so often urged, and by whom they are so well understood; but, by a brief recapitulation, to remind ourselves frequently of things already known, for the better assisting of our meditations, cannot,

S E R M O N I.

5

cannot, but in many cases, be very useful :
“ For me (saith St. Paul) to repeat unto you
“ the same things is not grievous, but for you
“ it is safe.”

When we see things made, we know they had a maker ; and the nature of the work discovers the author, as by the effect the cause is known.

From the plain and undeniable truths, that we are, and that we had a beginning, and that we made not ourselves, it follows, that there is “ one above all,” one who always was, and is independent, and without cause, who is the author of every thing else, and who possesses in a supreme degree all the perfections which we find exhibited in ourselves, in small portions and resemblances.

The works of the creation, both in their contrivance and origination, are a glorious manifestation of the existence and perfections of God. There is nothing that affords a more sensible proof of the existence and goodness of the Deity, than the beauty of the universe, those innumerable, delightful appearances which are scattered through the scenes of the visible creation.

The magnificence, and variety, and beauty of the whole ; the exact proportion of its parts, the decent order in which they are disposed,

B 3 and

and the regularity of their several motions, proclaim it to be the work of one Creator, who is every where present to govern, preserve, and superintend.

Thunder and lightning, and earthquakes, and the like, which are astonishing phenomena of nature, may perhaps terrify us into an apprehension of a superior power; but this is a proof, which attacks the senses in the most sweet and agreeable, though (at the same time) in the most forcible and convincing manner. This presents us with the most lovely and amiable view of our Maker, and whilst it persuades our understandings of his Being and Existence, it engages our affections to adore and love him.

The beauty of the universe plainly shews that it is neither the work of fate, nor of blind chance, nor fortuitous concourse, but of a powerful and munificent intelligence.

With how many charms and graces hath he adorned every part of the universe, as if he designed that nature should represent to us the beauty and loveliness, as well as the wisdom and beneficence of its author!

The ample arch of Heaven, extended over our heads, plainly declares a God, for “the firmament sheweth his handy work;” and, on earth, what rhetoric can describe the beauty,

ty, and what arithmetic count the variety of things here displayed before us, which have all their use, and all their peculiar beauty and wonders, singly for themselves speaking forth the praises of their author, and all of them together, in one universal concert, with one harmonious voice, proclaiming a God, the author of their existence.

But in no where doth he appear more visibly than in ourselves ; Man, the emblem of himself, as a God on earth, and the glory of all his works, made after his own image, the top and perfection of the visible world, the effect and result of divine wisdom, and creature of his counsel, who is endued with a rational and immortal soul, lodged in a fair and majestic structure, a suitable habitation for so noble a guest !

As man is the most excellent of animals, so is he likewise the most stately and beautiful. The holy Psalmist was so struck with the admiration of himself, that he (in extacy) confessed the supremacy of wisdom in God, in the workmanship of him.

“ Thou (saith he) hast fashioned me behind
“ and before ; such knowledge is too wonder-
“ ful and excellent for me, I cannot attain
“ unto it ; marvellous are thy works, O Lord,
“ and that my soul knoweth right well.”

Thus

Thus wonderful is man. " How passing
" wonder, then, is he, who made him such!"
But further, the inferior, terrestrial animals,
are not without their proper use and orna-
ment; yea, the very insects, so much inferior
to other animals, are equal to any in their
form, their use, and visage. All these are
things actually existing before our eyes, in the
contemplation whereof, singly and together,
the wisdom, and power, and goodness, disco-
verable in them, will puzzle and amaze us, in
conceiving how things should be as they are
without a God, being all of them beyond hu-
man contrivance, and many of them before
human existence.

This is a faint and imperfect sketch of the
beauty of the universe: he that would have a
just and an adequate idea of that stupendous
Whole, must consult the original.

The beauties of nature are too various and
exquisite to be truly delineated by any pencil
but her own, or be described by mortal elo-
quence; " for who can declare the noble
" works of the Lord, or who can shew forth
" all their greatness?" A thousand secret
charms, ten thousand inexpressible graces, will
be wanting in the most complete and lively re-
presentation that can be given by the wisest of
the sons of men. For, " how manifold are thy
" works

"works, O Lord ! in wisdom hast thou made
"them all ; the earth is full of thy goodness."

As it is a pleasing, so it is a rational service, to contemplate on the works, and adore the goodness of the beneficent father of mankind ; nor can the mind fail to be warmed with becoming devotion, when it remarks the various, the infinite instances of his good-will to his creatures, manifested throughout the creation.

No creature endued with the least spark of reason, who considers the scene before him, can doubt of the existence of a God ; and, indeed, Atheism is exploded so perfectly under this view, that the man who professes it would be contemned, no less for want of understanding, than for want of religion ; the most cursory and general observation demonstrating a Deity.

But, when we survey matters more minutely, and examine the nice coherences of things ; when we trace the manifold marks of design, and exuberant goodness ; when we behold the stupendous provision of Providence for human wants, as well as for the wants of the inferior creation ;—in short, when, with a philosophic attention, we read the great volume of nature, we must derive from every page of the sacred code, arguments of faith and dependance, of gratitude and love.

Yea,

Yea, is it possible for any man to think that all this use, and beauty, and ornament, which appears in every part of nature, and meets our eye wherever we turn it, can have any other author than a wise and beneficent being?—reason forbids it.

Yea shall it, can it be possible, that amidst such evident proofs of design, of wisdom, and goodness, any creature should either doubt or deny the existence of God, or, by disobedience, incur his displeasure, and ungratefully receive the high instances of his paternal regard!—no, rather let us rejoice, when we reflect that so wise and so watchful a Creator is also our preserver and father, ready to supply all our wants, observant of all our necessities, and wakeful to all our better concerns; when we join our great poet, and say,

“ These are thy glorious works, parent of good !
“ Almighty ! thine, this universal frame !
“ Thus wond’rous fair—thyself how wond’rous then !
“ Unspeakable ! who sittest above the heavens,
“ To us invisible, or dimly seen
“ In these thy lowest works : yet these declare
“ Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine !”

It is commonly alledged, I know, by unbelievers, that all these things are done by Second causes.

Now, suppose they were (which however is not universally true) yet how would that diminish

SERMON I.

11

nish the necessity of acknowledging the first cause?

It (among men) many things are performed, by the use of instruments, are those things therefore ever the less justly ascribed to the hands which used them, or doth this make it possible that therefore they performed without assistance?

All natural, all second causes, are nothing else but either the inanimate motions of senseless matter, or the voluntary motions of dependent creatures; and what are these, but one of them the direct operation, and the other the free permission only of him who ruleth over all?

Men's neglecting, therefore, to infer the Being of God from every thing they see, or think of, is, in reality, as great a stupidity, as if from the constant and regular continuance of the day-light, men should cease to observe that there is a sun in the heavens, which illuminates the whole, and from whence that light proceeds. Nor would it be more absurd to imagine, that the light would continue, though the sun, which causeth it, should itself be extinguished, than that the effects of nature can go regularly on, without the Being of God, which causes them.

To

To evade this argument, there is no other possible way, but to affirm, that either all things were made by chance, or that they were from everlasting all eternal, necessarily of themselves.

As to chance, it is evident, 'tis nothing but a mere word, or an abstract notion, in our manner of conceiving things. It has in itself no real being; it is nothing, and therefore can do nothing.

Besides, in the works of God, the further men search, and the more discoveries they make, the greater exactness they constantly find; whereas, in things done, either by the art of man, or by what we call chance, the Contrary is always true; the more they are examined, the less accurate they appear.

Beyond all credulity, therefore, is the credulousness of Atheists, whose belief is so absurdly strange, as to suppose that fate or chance, those thoughtless or rather chimerical principles, could provide not only such an amazing plenty, but have likewise consulted the ornament and delight, the order and harmony, which is observable in nature.

It would be a difficult task to convince a reasonable peasant, that even a common cottage, that serves only to shelter its inhabitants from the inclemencies of the weather, was the mere effect of chance; but he would certainly stand amazed

amazed at our folly, should we endeavour seriously to persuade him, that a fair and magnificent palace, exactly regular in its design, adorned with elegant sculptures and paintings, and all the other decorations of art, was the mere concourse of atoms thus blindly adjusted.

He would certainly from thence infer a wise agent, even as we, from the works of creation, a supreme, all-wise, and beneficent God. For, "if every house is builded by some man, how much more (as the Apostle justly argueth) must he that built all things, be God?"

How unreasonable is it to impute an effect to chance, that carries with it all the arguments and characters of wisdom and contrivance?

On the other hand, if any will affirm that all things are eternal, yet still the argument holds as strong as before, that things which cannot for any time exist without a cause, can much less (without the same) exist through all eternity, unless they will affirm that all things exist by an internal necessity in their own nature; which that they do not, is evident from hence, that there exists in the world an infinite diversity of things, whereas, necessity is uniform and without variation.

If it be said that we received our being from our forefathers by a continued natural suc-

sion, (which, however, would not in any step have been possible without a perpetual Providence) yet still the argument holds no less strong concerning the first of the whole race, that he could not but be made by a superior intelligent cause.

If an Atheist (contrary to the truth of all history) shall contend that there may have been, without any beginning at all, an eternal succession of men and things; yet still it will be no less evident, that such a perpetual succession could not have been, without an eternal superior cause; because, in the nature of things themselves, there is manifestly no necessity that any such succession of transient beings, either temporary or perpetual, should have existed at all.

Besides, it is evident that both we ourselves, and all the other beings we know in the world, are weak and dependent creatures, who neither gave ourselves a being, nor can preserve it by any power of our own, and that therefore we entirely owe our being to some superior and more powerful cause, to God, "who "alone doth wonderful works, and marvellous "to behold."

The world, then, is plainly the offspring of the one great and wise Mind which produced it, and disposed all its parts in that beautiful order

order in which they appear and continue, and gave them those regular motions which they preserve, and by which they are preserved.

Yea, it is by no means unreasonable to attribute this vast frame of the universe, and the innumerable multitude of creatures therein, to God, as the author of them.

To suppose a Being of infinite goodness, power, and wisdom, the efficient cause of the world's creation, is in itself a thing neither improbable nor absurd: For, what is more likely to make this immense world, to stretch forth the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, than infinite Power? What is more likely to communicate being, and so many degrees of happiness, to such variety of creatures, than infinite goodness? What is more likely to continue this beautiful fabrick of the universe, and all the creatures therein, so perfect in their kind, and each part so exactly fitted to the whole, than infinite wisdom? None surely but God, "who alone doth wonderful works, and "marvellous to behold."

Add to this, "the force of conscience," and "the consent of all nations" in the case before us.

Secondly, as reason thus forcibly constrains us to the acknowledgment of a God, so also revelation more strongly confirms it.

Whether the world had a beginning, or was from eternity, is a question that concerns an ancient matter of fact, and can only be decided by testimony and the probabilities of reason, both which concur to prove, that the world was created, and had a beginning, and that God was the author thereof, since no one can operate without a real existence.

That it is in no way improbable that the world was made, and that God was the author thereof, hath been already shewn : We shall now therefore have recourse to what testimonies can be produced in favour of the point before us ; and here both universal tradition, and written history, are clearly on our side.

“ The most ancient nations, the Egyptians and Phœnicians, did agree with the Greeks, that the world did begin, and should have an end, and that God (the Maker and Governor of it) is present in all its parts.” The most ancient Philosophers did also consent to this tradition.

The Heathen Philosophers agreed that the world was made of water, which exactly corresponds with Moses’s account of the Creation, that “ the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Nay, even Aristotle himself says, that “ the Gods were anciently represented by the Heathens, as swearing by the river,

“ river Styx, because water was supposed to
“ be the principal of all things.” And it was
an ancient general tradition among all men,
“ that all things are of God, and were made
“ by him.”

Maximus Tyrius also observes, “ that how-
“ ever men differ in other things, yet they all
“ agree in this, that there is one God, who
“ is the King and Father of All.”

The History of Moses (the most ancient of
any extant) is another credible testimony that
there is a God, and that the world began thro'
him. Nothing can be more simple or sublime
than his opening—“ In the beginning God
created the heaven and the earth.” He could
not speak more assuredly if he had been a spec-
tator; and, by these words, mythology, sys-
tems, and absurdities shrink to nothing, and
become mere chimeras in the eyes of reason.

Josephus, and all the Jewish doctors, do
abundantly confirm it.

The Holy Scriptures are full to this pur-
pose, declaring that there is a God, and he the
author of all things. Hither we may refer
those texts which make mention of his name,
which are many and innumerable; and those
which declare his unity, as, “ To us there is
“ one God;” “ There is none other God but
“ one,” and the like; and those which ascribe
all

all honour and glory to him ; and finally, those which refer our duty to him. Yea, upon the supposition that "there is a God," and that "he is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him," it is that the Scriptures themselves are writ ; yea, writ by the inspiration of God, which, were he not, could not be.

So that the reasonableness of the thing itself, universal tradition, and the most ancient histories, and those of the greatest authority, are all most clearly on our side, and do jointly concur in the proof of the Being and Existence of God, than which we cannot desire more convincing arguments.

But, if there was no God, and the world was eternal, and had no beginning, such tradition and history were needless, and undoubtedly would not have been ; nor would the reason of mankind have ever acknowledged it.

The Being of God, and his Existence, thus established, I shall proceed,

Secondly, to shew how we are to conceive of him ; for, a right notion of the only true God is as necessary to a true religion, as the belief that there is a God is to any religion at all.

"He, therefore, that cometh to God must" not only "believe that he is" but also that he is such a one as he hath revealed himself to be : without which faith, it is no less impossible to please

please him, than when, by denying his essence, we endeavour wholly to destroy his existence.

In order, therefore, to conceive of God aright, we are to consider him as absolutely possessed of all imaginable perfection; and are to separate for ever from him, at the greatest distance, whatever favours either of sin, folly, or imperfection.

And, first, whatever can be conceived as an "Excellency of Being," must be ascribed to God in the highest degree of our conceptions, yea, and beyond them; for we are not to confine the perfection of God to our imagination only, as if we could "find out the Almighty to perfection;" but, on the contrary, we are to believe that the perfections of the divine nature are boundless and unlimited, and that they infinitely exceed our highest thoughts, and apprehensions of them.

This seems to be the natural notion which all men have had of God, viz. that he is the most perfect Being. Accordingly, the Heathens call him "the very best and greatest; " "for, (say they) as his Being is, so must his perfections be;" he being the supreme Lord, must have all perfections in the highest degree and manner, without limits or dependency, and without capacity of addition, or possibility of diminution. Hence is it that he

rules whereby to rectify and govern our judgment herein.

First, let us begin with the most natural, plain, and easy perfections of God, such as are his power, and wisdom, and justice, and truth, and goodness, which all men are well able to conceive of, and understand, and to which most of the rest may be reduced.

By these let us govern our reasonings about God, and lay them for a foundation, whereby to rectify all our apprehensions of, and reasonings about him; at all times elucidating things that are more obscure, by the things that are more clear; for, “wouldst thou be wise, consider not beginnings, since thou art thereby led to the fullness of knowledge.” But,

Secondly, A second rule, whereby to judge of God, and of the nature and perfections of his Being, is “not to be wise above what is written,” not to deny or doubt of any of the divine perfections, which are clearly revealed in the word of God.

Thirdly, A third rule, whereby to judge of God is, among different opinions concerning him (as there always have been, and will be in the world), to choose those which are “furthest from extremity; because truth, as well as virtue, generally lies between the extremes.

But

But further, another rule, whereby to judge of God, is, to put a difference as to our knowledge of, and our deductions from, God's imitable perfections, which are pure objects of our faith, and his moral and communicable perfections, which relate to our practice.

Of the first, we neither have, nor can have, a just and adequate notion of them; because, they being only in God, there is nothing occurring to us, to which we can compare them. Our certain inferences from them, therefore, can be only such as Scripture affords us. But then,

As to God's imitable perfections, the matter is far otherwise; for we are enjoined to imitate and resemble them, which we could in no way do, had we not in some measure a knowledge of them. Though, therefore, we cannot argue concerning God's incommunicable attributes, otherwise than revealed unto us, yet we may more than argue so against the absolute decrees of reprobation, and of denying grace, sufficient for the performance of our duty; from the consideration of the divine justice, truth, and sincerity, and from God's general love and goodness to the sons of men.

But further, another rule necessary to be observed (that we may judge aright of the divine perfections) is, to consider them in conjunction, as all consistent one with another,
and

and not to set up, and magnify one attribute, at the expence of another.

The greatest mistakes in religion having been observed to proceed from a separating the perfections of God, and framing wide notions of some, at the expence of others, in the unity whereof the divine essence consists.

Were this duly considered, men would not be so presumptuous (as generally they are) to encourage themselves in sin, as knowing that God is just, as well as merciful. Neither would penitents (from the apprehension of God's justice) be cast into despair, as knowing that he is merciful, as well as just, to those who return to him.

Upon the whole, we should so suppose of God, as not to dread him with a slavish terror, as partial, and a "respecter of persons," as a cruel and arbitrary master; nor think (on the other hand) that his clemency will not permit him to be offended at sin, nor that he will finally punish it; or, that he may be appeased by easier methods than what he hath already prescribed, viz. faith, repentance, and amendment of life.

But we should judge of him as whole and entire, as having every perfection complete, and uniformly existing with each other.

The

The last rule I shall lay before you is, to entertain no opinion that evidently contradicts the practice of religion, and a good life, tho' never so specious and subtle arguments be produced for it; for God, whose whole Nature tends to goodness, can (in no way) contradict himself.

From what hath been said, I shall make the following instructive and practical uses.

First, of the folly of Atheism, and its hurt to mankind, which plainly discovers itself in its confidence, without the least assurance, and against the clearest evidence.

To such as are Sceptics or unbelievers of the Being of God, it is adviseable, in the first place, that they consider how uncomfortable their opinion is.

It is plain that such is the condition of human nature in this life, as to be insufficient for itself.

We are continually surrounded with evils which we cannot prevent; with wants which we cannot supply; with infirmities which we cannot remove; and dangers which we can in no way escape. Our enjoyments are such, as are not for one moment secure; our expectations, of such things as are not in our power to accomplish; we are apt to grieve for things which we cannot help, and to be tormented

with fears of what we cannot prevent; and wretched indeed must the days of our pilgrimage have been, was there not a God at the helm of affairs to guide and conduct them; and to be our strength and stay in time of need.

In all these cases there is no substantial comfort, but in the belief of a God, and in the singular satisfaction of having him for our friend.

How disconsolate and contradictory then must Atheism be; for, on the one hand, he, who owns a God, and lives suitable to such a persuasion, hath an interest in all his perfections, hath "every thing requisite to life and godliness," is provided for in every respect, whether of this life, or a better; whilst the Atheist is left to himself in the midst of ten thousand accidents, none better than himself to help him: and, how frail is man! in the midst of distress where can he fly? to God? nay, for he believes him not.

The former (he who believes a God), if he is in want, is assured that God's Goodness will supply him; if he is wrong'd, his Justice will right him; if he is ignorant of his wants, his Omnipotence "knows whereof he hath need." Is he in danger, his Omnipresence will watch over him for good. Is he insufficient for himself, his Omnipotence will do all things for him;

him. Is he loaded with trespasses and sins, his Mercy will forgive him ; yea, doth he still persist and continue to sin, God is patient and long-suffering towards him, that he may bring him to repentance : “ He is every thing to “ every man, he is redemption, sanctification, “ and righteousness ; ” whilst the latter (the Atheist)’s views are all melancholy and disconsolate ; the best of his hopes, and the pride of his glory, is, that as “ he comes up like a “ flower, so he must again be, one day, cut “ down,” and then rest in silence for ever. Vain man ! how low, how truly pitiable ! by no means to be envied, inasmuch as he hath no “ rock of defence,” no “ anchor of hope,” nor haven of everlasting joy to thrust into, after the storm and conflict of death.

But, and well would it be for him in this case, if death would make an utter end of him ; but this, which is his glory, will by no means befall him ; for no man’s disbelief will alter the reality of things ; the bare denying God will not destroy him—will not—but will rather more strongly increase his fury against him ; for, as he is a holy God, so is he also just and terrible, and “ will by no means acquit the “ wicked.”

Well therefore might the Psalmist style him “ Fool, that saith in his heart there is no God.”

But, it is much to be feared, that not reason, but impiety and irreligion, is the whole ground of their infidelity; men whose interest it is that there should be no God, wish it, and from wishing to believing, the distance (we know) is not great; "they are corrupt, and become abominable," therefore, to quiet the stings of a guilty conscience, and reconcile themselves to their sinful courses, they banish from their minds both God and a future state. "Foolish men that they are," as if God was the less, because they are the more wicked; as if God was not, because (as their interest is) they would not have him to be. But "God sitteth in the heavens, over all, from the beginning: He reigneth, be the heathen never so impatient; he is King, be the people never so sinful, or disbelieve him; be they never so unmindful of him."

Had the thing therefore really, in itself, any uncertainty, (which is by no means the case) yet it could not but be what every wise and reasonable man must desire and wish might be true.

The proofs, therefore, in favour of a Deity, (were they much weaker than they are) yet deserve to be seriously considered and attended to, because the hazard (on one side) is infinitely great, if religion, which we neglect, be true. For here the good man's comfort

fort is and will be real ; and the Atheist (however he may brave it out on earth, and whilst all things go smoothly on) will not be able hereafter so much as to "lift up his head" but will be eternally abashed, when feeling in himself the dire effects of his own infidelity and wickedness ; whereas (on the other side) there is no hazard at all, if, being received as true, it could at last possibly prove to be a mistake.

For, to believe that there is a God, even though there were none, is altogether beneficial, and without the least prejudicee, as being the principle from whence men do good, and are restrained from evil ; and whereby no loss is hazarded but that of our lusts, which are really most prejudicial to us ; or, at the utmost, some temporal convenience, the want of which is abundantly recompensed by the present content, and future expectation it affords, and without which it would be impossible either to live safely, or die comfortably ; whereas, to think there is no God, or could we only suppose so, yet this can bring no real adyantage, but is materially to our hurt ; because it leaves men equally liable to crosses and pains, to fears and doubts more abundant, and finally to death also ; yea, and leaves nothing to support and comfort instead of them, when every thing in this world fails and forsakes them. So that,

put the case which way you will, the true believer hath all and every advantage before the infidel ; insomuch, that if there were no God, it is confessedly best that it should be generally believed that there is one, that we may be provided against the worst, and not be confident, where our opinion can do no good, but exposeth us to so much hurt ; especially, since there is all the reason and proof in the world to assure us that there is a God, and the belief whereof hath so great and visible a tendency to the improvement of life, and the refinement of our conduct.

Secondly, Is there a God ?—Then let us with reverence acknowledge, adore, and obey him.

If there was no God, but every man was made by chance, then we might walk as chance should blindly direct us ; but, as God is clearly revealed unto us, our reason also freely assenting thereto, it more than becomes us “ to walk “ circumspectly, and not as the Gentiles, who “ know not God.”

We are wont to do obedience to, to reverence and respect even an earthly superior, and shall we then deny that to the great God of Heaven and Earth, the Creator, which we give to an earthly man, his creature ?—That be far from us :—Yea, shall not we, who acknowledge

ledge a God, " ascribe unto him his glory due ?"—Yea, let us " worship him with an " holy worship, and him only let us serve."

But further, As the Being of God demands our reverence, and awful respect, so doth it also require our obedience to him.

There are few who consider the first principles of religion so seriously and so frequently as they ought to do, and in such a manner as to cause them to produce their proper effect, by influencing their whole lives and conversations aright ; for knowledge is but a dormant habit, if not excited by constant meditation ; and powers are of no service, if not brought into act. " Faith without works is dead ;" yea, " as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." He doubles it, and by this sure simile shews the reality of the thing.

Right notions of the Being and Attributes of God (every one knows) are the foundation of all religion ; but then these notions, and this knowledge, must not be a bare speculation, but a serious and practical, and an affecting impression, and deep sense upon the mind, producing its proper effects, viz. righteousness, and universal obedience. This is a very easy and intelligent notion of faith, and such as shews plainly that faith is not a mere speculative

tive act of the understanding, but a substantial, practical, moral virtue, "fruitful in every good work."

"In vain, therefore, shall we call him Lord, Lord! if we do not the things which he says :" yea, "if he made us, and not we ourselves," then not we ourselves, but he is to give us laws, and require obedience from us; and what should greatly induce us hereto is the exceeding and abundant goodness of God herein, in that his laws are tempered with so much mercy, and tender compassion towards us, that they are truly benefits, instead of restraints upon us, being both easy and light, and equally tending to our present as well as future welfare : "Honour, therefore, and obey the Lord."

But further, is God all perfect? then it is certain that he is beyond our help or service. "He needeth not the wisdom of the wise," nor the power of the mighty; for, "the foolishness of God (as the expression is) is wiser than men, and his weakness is beyond our strength." He therefore can receive no benefit nor advantage by all the homage we can do unto him; for, "what profit can our goodness do him?" who being absolutely perfect, can admit of no accession to the perfection of his Being?

Of

Of how great condescension then is it, in the supreme God of Heaven, to have respect unto us, or to any of our services, seeing he can receive no benefit by what we do: it is therefore of God's free grace and mercy that he is pleased to reward his servants, and to encourage their obedience with an assurance of his gracious acceptance, the which should make us more readily obey him, since it is not for his, but for our sakes, that we thus "walk
" humbly before him."

Again,—Is God all-perfect? (i. e.) is he completely good, and free from sin, from folly and imperfection? then, how doth it concern us to approve ourselves before him, (i. e.) to resemble him (as far as we are able), to flee from "evil, and eschew iniquity, to seek peace
" and ensue it; and, to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect: to study (in an especial manner) all his imitable perfections, and endeavour to our utmost to copy thereafter, "that we may be the children of our Father, which is in heaven, who is good, and
" doth good, and who cannot be tempted with
" evil;" and "who is good to all, and whose
" tender mercies are over all his works."

Again,—Is God all-perfect? then nothing can concern us more, or be more our interest
or

or wisdom, than to make God our portion, to secure to ourselyes a title in his favour and protection.

For, if this all-sufficient God be our God, then have we a full security of freedom from all evil, and of enjoying all the blessings which we can either hope for or desire.

Make, therefore, God your rock, and put your confidence in him, for “his way is perfect, and in him is everlasting strength.”

But, lastly, Is God all-perfect? Then this should induce us to walk before him with a perfect heart, (i. e.) without dissimulation; without partiality, or revolting from him, for he is perfect in wisdom to discern our hearts, and no hypocrisy can be concealed from him. He is perfect in power, and therefore fully able to revenge all disobedience; and, on the other hand, as fully able to reward all our faithful services towards him; and, in wisdom and goodness, equally inclined so to do.

To conclude, As there is a God, and he essentially, independently, and immutably perfect, how can we otherwise than place our trust and confidence in him, and repair to him for all those blessings which we want, and render him the praises due for all that we enjoy; to submit to his government, acquiesce in

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all his providential dispensations, and yield obedience to all his holy prescriptions, that we may have his favour here, and enjoy him hereafter.

SERMON

SERMON II.

That there is but one GOD.

EXODUS xx. 3. “*Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.*”

“**H**EAR, O Israel, the Lord our God is
“one Lord.”

The unity of the divine nature is a notion, wherein the greatest and wisest part of mankind have always agreed, their reason inducing them hereto; for one God, who is of infinite perfection, is as sufficient to all purposes whatsoever, as ten thousand (if they were possible) could in anywise be.

Agreeably whereto we find the Almighty, when declaring his essence, confirming there also the unity of his existence: “I am the Lord, thy God: Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.”

In speaking to the point before us, “the unity of the Deity,” I shall observe the following order:

First,

First, The import hereof.
Secondly, Its confirmation ; and
Thirdly, The uses to be made therefrom.
“ Thou shalt have no other Gods but me ;”
Not here supposing that there are more Gods
than one, but only forbidding any thing else
to be substituted in its stead, to be esteemed
and worshipped by us as God.

For, though our worship cannot change the
nature of things, or make any thing a God,
which is not really so, yet doth it make it so
to us, by using it thereby as God ; so that the
precept before us is particularly levelled against
Polytheism, or a variety of Gods, which was
the sin of the Heathens, who, though they
generally believed that there was only one su-
preme Being, the Author and Governor of
all the rest ; yet with him they worshipped a
multitude of inferior Deities, who, as his De-
puties, were supposed to preside over the seve-
ral parts of the universe. And to this the Apo-
stle seems to allude, when he says, “ We know
“ that there is no other God, but one ; for
“ though there be that are called Gods both in
“ Heaven and in Earth (as there be Gods many
“ and Lords many), yet to us there is but one
“ God, the Father, of whom are all things,
“ and we in him ; and one Lord Jesus Christ,
“ by whom are all things, and we by him.”

Rejecting, therefore, all these subordinate and inferior Deities of the Heathens, of whatever sort or denomination, we are here forbid to have any more than the only supreme God ; as to whom (though we worship three persons) yet own we only one Essence; nothing else but this one, either instead of, or in copartnership with him ; not any thing (of any distinction or denomination whatever) having any place allowable in our religious services, according to the express intent of the text and commandment before us.

The Holy Scriptures indeed give the name of Gods sometimes to the creatures, because of some faint resemblance they bear to God, either by nature or office.

Thus (for instance) the holy Angels are styled Gods, because of their spiritual nature, and of that might and wisdom wherein they excell, and in which they bear some weak resemblance to God ; as, when the Psalmist says of man, “ Thou madest him little lower than the Gods, i. e. the Angels ; and saith to them, touching his only begotten Son, “ Worship him, all ye Gods ;” i. e. as saith the Apostle, “ Let all the Angels of God worship him.”

Again,—This name is given to God’s Vicegerents upon earth, because they all derive their

their power and right of government from him, who is the fountain of all power; as in those words of the Psalmist, "God standeth in the congregation of Princes; he is a Judge among Gods:" And of the Hebrew servant that will not go free, it is said, "his Master shall bring him to the Gods, i. e. to the Judges." And again, "Thou shalt not revile the Gods, nor speak evil of the ruler of thy people." Once more,

This name is given to the Ambassadors of God, or those who deliver his message unto others.

In this sense God saith to Moses, "See, I have made thee a God," not absolutely to all, but "to Pharaoh, to whom I send thee as my Ambassador, to speak to him in my name; and Aaron shall be thy mouth to speak what I reveal to thee, and thou shalt be to him for a God," to declare from me what he shall speak.

Accordingly, our Lord informs us, that the Scriptures call them "Gods, to whom the word of the Lord came;" and saith, "He that heareth them" (who are commissioned from him to teach his word) "heareth him, and he that despiseth them despiseth him." And the Apostle saith, that "he that despiseth them, despiseth not man, but God." Did men

but consider seriously these things, they would not be so forward (as they generally are) "to speak evil of dignities."

But, albeit, though there be many who in these several accounts are called Gods, yet is there but one, who by way of eminence and excellency is so called, and who is therefore styled "the Great, and the Most High God; " "the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords; God over all, blessed for ever." But,

Secondly, That there are no more Gods but one. "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have none other Gods but me."

This I shall make appear,

First, from natural light or reason; and then,

Secondly, From Holy Writ, or Divine Revelation; and,

First, The Unity of the divine nature is a notion, wherein the greatest and the wisest part of mankind did always agree, and may therefore reasonably be presumed to be either natural, or to have sprung from some original tradition, delivered down to us from the first parents of mankind. And, although the idolatry of the Heathen plainly shews that this notion, in process of time, was greatly degenerated into an apprehension of a plurality of Gods, yet the generality of mankind, all along, from the

the force of reason, acknowledged no more Gods than one, as being assured that one, who is of infinite perfection, is as sufficient to all purposes whatsoever, as ten thousand could possibly be.

In the midst of all the crowd and confusion of Deities, and the various superstitions about them, the wiser Heathen preserved a true notion of one supreme God, whom they defined an infinite Spirit, pure from all matter, and free from all imperfection. And all the variety of their worship was, as they pretend in excuse of it, through a desire of expressing their gratitude, in honouring the memories of their benefactors, in those first and ruder ages of the world; and, as a more particular owning of the various representations of the divine power and excellencies, which manifested themselves in the world, and of the several communications of blessings and favours by them imparted to men.

But how far they erred in this, clearly appears from the precepts of the more wise and learned among them, who were fully persuaded of the truth before us, and, as is supposed, died in, and for the confession of it; so that there is sufficient ground to believe, that the Unity of the divine nature, or the notion of one supreme God, Creator, and Governor of

the world, was the primitive and general belief of mankind, and that polytheism and idolatry were a corruption and degeneracy from the original notion which mankind had concerning God, as the Scripture plainly declares.

But, however this be, we find in the first revelation which God was pleased to make of himself, all these erroneous notions confuted, and men stood convicted of them, and were confirmed, under the highest authority, in the doctrine before us.

Nothing is more plain than this, under all the history of the Old Testament; and since that time we find, from the first ages of Christianity, this truth kept up and maintained.

The Unity of the Deity was a part of the ancient Apostolic Faith.

That there is but one God, hath ever been concluded to have been sufficiently signified in that article of our Creed, wherein God is mentioned in the singular number, “I believe in God;” not Gods, as of many; but “God,” as of one only—“I believe in God;” and wherein other ancient Creeds also have followed as a main point of our belief, distinguishing us from Pagans and Idolaters, who, (distributing the divine honour among a multitude of deities of their own invention, and

the

the Devil's suggestion) greatly wronged God, and exceedingly exposed themselves.

For, that there is but one God, plainly appears from that unity and order, that peace and harmony, so apparent in the constitution and conservation of all things; which, as they all conspire to one end, and continue in one, uniform course, afford a reasonable occasion for jealousy to suspect a diversity of conduct; so that the same arguments, that prove the existence, and illustrate and inform us of the essence, tend also to convince us of the Unity of the Godhead.

But, further, That there is but one God, is sufficiently evident, it being agreeable to the common reason of mankind, and to the clearest and most essential notions which we have of God.

Unity is essential to the Deity. Plurality implies diversity, which the divine simplicity cannot admit, as being wholly independent of itself.

Besides, if there be more Gods than one, then there must be more infinites of the same kind, which is impossible; because, one infinite Being doth, and must comprehend all perfection, not only considered in a general notion, but actually; so that there can be none

Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: for

for any other Deity to be invested with, or possessed of in the same manner.

The common notion which all mankind have had concerning God is, that he is a Being absolutely perfect; (i. e.) that all perfection meets, and is united in him. But to imagine more Gods than one, and some perfections in one, and some to be in another, totally destroys his essential existence, and must conclude him imperfect, as wanting what another hath.

But if, again, we suppose more Gods than one, each of which hath all perfections united in him, then all, but one, would be superfluous, and therefore (by just and necessary consequence) not only may, but of necessity must be supposed not to be, since necessary existence is essential to the Deity; and therefore, if but one God be necessary, there can be no more than one.

This we may evince further, from the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconveniency of the contrary; for, if there be more Gods than one, who can ascertain their number? — for we can stop nowhere: Who can assure himself that he hath worshipped all the Deities he ought to worship? and that he hath injured and offended none by his neglect to worship them? for the neglect hereof

hereof to any one of them may be an offence, seeing “the preference of the one is a contumely of the other,” as less deserving his homage. So that which way soever we turn, the notion of Polytheism (or more Gods than one) is in its nature repugnant, and self-contradictory. But, to confirm this further, let us have recourse to the written history of Divine Record.

The texts which I might produce here to this purpose are so many and various, that it would be altogether tedious, if not impossible to recite them all; however, some few are necessary; and, that there is but one God, St. Paul expressly declares: “There is no other God but “one;” and Moses lays this as the foundation of the natural law, as well as of the Jewish religion. “The Lord he is our God, and there is “none beside him.” Again, “There is one “God, and there is none other but he.”

This the prophet Isaiah perpetually declares, in opposition to the polytheism and variety of Gods among the Heathens, “I am the first, “and I am the last, and besides me there is no “God.” And again, “Is there any God besides me? There is no “God, I know not any.” He who hath an infinite knowledge, and knows all things, knows no other God; and our blessed Saviour makes this

this the foundation, the fundamental article of all religion, and the knowledge of it necessary to every man's salvation. "This," says he, "is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God." But further,

We have an express command from God Himself in my text, to the purpose before us.

When God was pleased to descend from Heaven, and visibly upon Mount Sinai, with tokens of exceeding great majesty, to declare His will to mankind, he lays this down in the first place as the cause, the reason, and ground of our obedience to what he should after say: "I am the Lord, thy God; thou shalt have none other Gods but me." And again,

In Deuteronomy we have a confirmation of it, which also is confirmed by quotation by our Saviour in the Gospel of St. Mark: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."

Having thus far ascertained what was proposed, I shall now,

Lastly, see what inferences can be made therefrom. And,

First, Is our Lord the only God? then him only shalt thou worship.

Moses makes this inference from the doctrine before us: "Hear, O Israel! the Lord, our God, is one Lord;" which text is also cited by our Saviour, who immediately

ately adds, “ therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy mind, and with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself; ” so that according to our Saviour, the whole duty of man, the love of God, and our neighbour, is founded in the Unity of the Divine Nature. It comprehends all the duties of the first table, as naturally flowing from it, viz. that we should serve him only, and pay no religious worship to any but to him.

For, to pay religious worship to any thing is (to us) to make it a God, and to acknowledge it as such; and therefore, God being but one, we can (in propriety only, and without sacrilege) give religious worship to none, but to him; and

Among all parts of religious worship, none is more peculiarly appropriated to the Deity than solemn invocation and prayer; for he, to whom men address their requests, at all times, and in all places, must be supposed to be always every where present, to understand all our desires and wants, and to be able to supply them. This God only is, and can do.

So, likewise, from the Unity of the Divine Nature, may be inferred, that we should not worship God by any sensible image or representation; because, God being a singular Being,

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So, likewise, from the Unity of the Divine Nature, may be inferred, that we should not worship God by any sensible image or representation; because, God being a singular Being,

Being, there is nothing like him, or that can without injury, and debasing his most spiritual, perfect, and immense Nature, be compared to him, as he himself, by his prophet Isaiah, says, “To whom will they liken me (saith the Lord), and make me equal?” and therefore with no distinction whatever can it be lawful to give religious worship, or any part of it, to any but to God; we can pray to none but to him, because he only is every where present, and “only knows the hearts of all the children of men.”

So that the reason of these two precepts is founded in the Unity of the Divine Nature; for, unless there be more Gods than one, one only must we worship, and pray to none but to him, as St. Paul rightly reasons: “How” (says he) “shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?”

Again, Is there but one only who is God? then must we be as wholly devoted to his service, as his worship. Here again Moses is our example: “Know” (says he), “and consider “in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in “Heaven above, and upon the earth beneath, “and there is none else; thou shalt, therefore, “keep his statutes and commandments;” among which this was one: “Thou shalt
“worship

“worship the Lord thy God, and him only
“shalt thou serve.”

God being He alone, from whom the powers of our soul, our faculties, and all our might, are entirely derived, it is but equitable that they should be wholly employed in his service.

Our heart, therefore, must be perfect with the Lord, and not “halt between two opinions,” (i. e.) divided between God and Mammon; there must be no rival in our hearts with God, but they must, without reserve, exception, or excuse, pursue the interests of his honour, and delight to do his will: Our mind, (i. e.) the powers of our understanding, must be employed to know what is “the good, the acceptable, and perfect will of God,” and to contrive by what means we may best advance his glory. Our wills must freely chuse, and with alacrity embrace the thing that is well pleasing to him, and thoroughly perform it: our executive powers must be employed with all the prudent zeal, activity, and fervour, that we can express in the performance of our duty to him. This being to serve him in the full import of the phrase, “with all our might.”

But further, the love likewise of our neighbour is founded in the Unity of the Divine Nature, and may be inferred from it.

If we have all one and the same God, we who consent in the acknowledgment and worship of this God alone, should also bear the greatest love to, and keep the strictest bonds of union, one towards another, “ walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, “ at all times endeavouring to keep the Unity “ of the Spirit in the bond of peace ; ” “ for “ there is one God and Father of all, who is “ above all by his sovereignty, and in you all “ by his spirit.”

Having then all one Father, we must all be brethren, and therefore ought to “ love as brethren ; yea, the Prophet assigns the reason why all mankind should be upon good terms one with another, and not be injurious ; “ Haye “ we not all (says he) one Father ? and hath “ not one God created us ? why then do we “ deal treacherously every man against his bro- “ ther ?”

When, therefore, we see such hatred and enmity among men, such division and animosities among Christians, we may not only ask with St. Paul, “ Is Christ divided ? ” but may also ask further, “ Is God divided ? ” Is there not one God, and are we not all his offspring ? Are we not all the sons of Adam, “ which was “ the Son of God ? ”

So

So that, if we trace ourselves to our original, we shall find a great nearness and equality among men: and this equality, that we are all God's creatures, and of his image; and that the only one God is the Father of us all, is a more real ground of mutual love, and peace and equity in our dealings one with another, than any of those petty differences and distinctions of strong and weak, of rich and poor, of wise and foolish, of base and honourable, can be to encourage men to any thing of insolence, injustice, and inequality of dealing, one towards another.

Because, that wherein we all agree, that we are the creatures and children of God, and have all one common Father, is essential and constant; but those things wherein we differ are in their nature accidental, and mutable, and happen to one another by turns.

But further, Is there but one only, who is God? The consideration of this should induce us to fear him above all things, to fear his anger, and be concerned to avoid what is displeasing to him, more than any evil which can here else befall us.

For, if He only be our God, what can be able to screen us from his wrath, or stop the execution of his vengeance upon us, if we at any time transgress his righteous laws, more es-

pecially if we die finally impenitent? This use the prophet Jeremiah makes of this consideration in these words: "Who would not fear
"thee, O King of Nations, for to thee doth it
"appertain; forasmuch as there is none like
"unto thee. O Lord, thou art great, and thy
"name is great in might."

But further, this attribute should engage us to place our confidence in God, to depend wholly for support and safety upon him, who being God alone, is alone able to support and "save us to the utmost."

He who thus makes God the object of his humble confidence, shall find a blessing from the Lord; yea, (as saith the Prophet) "Blessed
"is the man who trusteth in God, and whose
"hope is in the Lord."

Whatever our friends may promise, God can put beyond their power to perform: how wise soever they may be to consult our good, yet God can blast their councils, and bring to nought all their devices; their lives, their faculties, and fortunes, being all subject to his power, and our reliance chiefly upon them for our support and safety may very justly induce him to blast all our hopes, and utterly defeat all our confidence; for (as saith the Prophet)
"cursed is the man who trusteth in any creature, and maketh flesh his hope, and who,
"in

“ in his heart, departeth from the living God.” He who is God alone can and will manage all things according to the counsel of his will.

Surely, therefore, happy are they who place their confidence in him alone; for as there is nothing which can controul his power, so nothing can over-reach his wisdom, or out-last his being. Hence it is that he speaks thus unto us: “ Look unto me, and be ye saved, “ all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and “ there is none else. I am God, and there is “ none like unto me; my counsel shall stand, “ and I will do all my pleasure.”

Lastly, Is there one God alone? Then to him alone belongs the praise and glory of all the mercies we receive, and all the blessings and preservations vouchsafed to us; since they are all the issues of that Providence which is entirely managed and directed by his sole power, wisdom, and goodness. Thus doth Hannah express her thanks: “ My heart rejoiceth in “ the Lord, mine horn is exalted in him; “ There is none holy as the Lord, for there is “ none besides him, neither is there any rock “ like our God.” And David (in like manner) says, “ For thy works sake, and accord-“ ing to thine own heart, hast thou done all “ these great things, wherefore thou art great,

SERMON II.

"O Lord, for there is none like thee, neither
"is there any God besides thee."

Seeing, therefore, that "of him, and from
"him, are all things," it is highly reasonable
that the praise of them should be given to him.
To whom, therefore, be glory and honour,
thanksgiving and praise, both now and for
ever.

He is good; his goodness is infinite;
he is wise; his wisdom is infinite;
he is omnipotent; his power is infinite;
he is benevolent; his love is infinite;

he is just; his justice is infinite;
he is true; his truth is infinite;

he is wise; his wisdom is infinite;
he is omnipotent; his power is infinite;
he is benevolent; his love is infinite;

he is just; his justice is infinite;
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he is just; his justice is infinite;

he is true; his truth is infinite;

SERMON

SERMON III.

That God is a Spirit.

JOHN iv. 24. “*God is a Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*”

THE Spirituality of the Divine Nature is that Attribute of God which is most absolute, and immediately declares his essence.

“*God is a Spirit.*”—This expression is singular, and not to be paralleled again in the Scripture. Indeed we have often mention made there of the “*Spirit of God,*” and the “*Spirit of the Lord,*” which signifies the Divine Power and Energy; and of “*the Holy Spirit,*” signifying the third person in the ever blessed Trinity.

But we nowhere meet with this expression, or any other equivalent thereto, that “*God is a Spirit,*” except in this place; nor indeed had it been here used, were it not to prove, that the best worship of God (and which

which is most proper to him) is spiritual. “God is a Spirit,” and therefore (as of consequence) it follows, that “we must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

So that what our Saviour here intends is not to prove the Spirituality of God’s nature, but only that the worship of him should be spiritual. Indeed there is no necessity that it should have been any where said, in Scripture, that “God is a Spirit,” it being one of the natural notions we have of God, no more than it is necessary that it should be told us that God is good, or that he is infinite, eternal, and the like; or, that the Scripture should prove to us the Being of God.

All these are manifest by the light of Nature, and whenever the Scripture mentions them, it is usually in order to some further purpose.

This being premised, I shall discourse on the words in the following order:

First, I shall shew what we are to understand by “God is a Spirit.”

Secondly, Prove that God is so: After which I shall,

Thirdly, Remove some few objections; and then conclude, with what inferences can be drawn therefrom.

First, The word Spirit is here used to express the nature and essence of God; for God hath

hath nothing of body or matter in his nature, but is purely a mind or spirit.

It is here to be observed that the Scripture, as it doth not much insist upon proving to us the Being of God, but rather always supposes that to be already known by the light of Nature; so also, when he mentions any of the natural attributes of the Divine Essence, it doth not usually enlarge either upon the proof or explication of them, but generally makes mention of them occasionally only, and as pre-supposing them before-hand to be well known by men's reason.

As I have already said, though the Scripture no where expressly stiles God a Spirit, but in this one single passage only; yet since in numberless places it does by consequence suppose him to be so, and founds our duty to him often upon that supposition; it is very reasonable for us to enquire (so far as our faculties will enable us) into the true notion of God's being a Spirit, so excellent an attribute of the Divine Nature. And here

The first, and lowest particular that is included in the notion of God's being a Spirit, is, that we are to conceive of him as of a Being, infinitely removed from all those gross properties which constitute the nature of matter or body.

When

When we say God is a Spirit, we mean that he is a free agent, a wise, a good, and a pure Being; that freedom, and wisdom, and knowledge, and goodness, are his nature, without body, parts, or matter.

I shall not here trouble you with the strict philosophical notion of that Being which we call Spirit (the Spirit of God) as that it is impenetrable, untangible, undivided, and the like, but shall rather content myself at present with the following description of it, viz.

When we say that "God is a Spirit," we mean that he is not composed of any bodily or material parts, though they be never so subtile or refined. A Spirit is not matter, and consequently doth not fall under any of our senses.

It is not of the parts of a body, for to these we find it opposed in Scripture by Christ himself, when he appeared to his Disciples after his resurrection.

Upon his appearance, they "were terrified and affrighted, and supposed it had been a Spirit." But, he said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see, for a Spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."

The most natural description of a Spirit is by these negatives.

It

It is not a body, nor hath any of the parts thereof; doth not consist of matter, or of any thing that falls under our senses; and, affirmatively, that it is a living very intelligent Being, of great knowledge and wisdom, and active; being of great power and might, and self-movement.

God, then is a Spirit, and like us hath knowledge and power, but hath them without suspension or intermission, and in the highest perfection. He is a Spirit, differing from all other Spirits by many ways, which we cannot possibly conceive, being himself infinite, and therefore above our finite conceptions, and excelling all other spirits beyond all imagination, because he is the Creator, and they only the creatures; he independent, and they subsisting only by his power and permission.

Having thus briefly explained what is meant by God's being a Spirit, or how we are to understand that attribute of the Divine Nature which we call his Spirituality, I proceed,

Secondly, To prove that God is so. The first and most natural notion that we have of God is, that he is a Being every way perfect; and from this notion we must argue concerning the properties which are to be attributed to God, and govern all our reasonings concerning him by this.

So

So that if it can be shewn that it would be an imperfection for God to be made up of body or matter, he (for that very reason) is proved to be a Spirit, because it is an imperfection to imagine him to be any thing else.

Now the denial of this attribute to God is, in effect, the denial of his being, and all his other excellencies, and consequently the denial of all the worship and service which is due unto him.

For, was God compounded of material parts, united to each other, he could not be eternal; for the parts themselves, of which his body is supposed to be composed, must then, in the nature of the thing, be antecedent to the union of them.

He could not be every where present, for natural reason assures us, that two bodies cannot be in one and the same place.

Were God, therefore, of a bodily substance, he could not be where other bodies are, and so must be excluded from this lower world, because it is full of material substances, much less be in us, or intimately connected with us.

We could not allow him any knowledge or wisdom, since it is inconceiveable how mere matter should understand, nor any liberty or freedom, seeing all material beings act from necessity of nature.

Lastly,

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Lastly, Such a God can have no goodness; for he is not good, who knows not what he doth, or does it not freely.

So that, remove from God the Spirituality of his nature, you remove from him at the same time both his knowledge and liberty; yea, and his goodness also, and consequently his providence, which depends upon his wisdom to order things according to the counsel of his will. Now, seeing these absurdities evidently follow from the supposition that God is matter, or of a bodily substance, we are constrained to affirm that “he is a spirit.”

Thus the natural light of reason dictates to us the Spirituality of the divine Being; and our Saviour (who, for certain, knew both his own divine nature, and that of his Father, from everlasting) confirms it: he who came with full authority from God, universally to reform the mistakes of men, in things relating to God, delivered this doctrine in a plain proposition, to be believed upon his authority, “God is a Spirit.”

The man, then, that denies the spirituality of the divine nature, that denies that “God is a Spirit,” cannot but be vehemently suspected either to have a gross and faulty understanding, or a very ill-will against God, or an evil

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design

design to root out of the minds of men the belief of a God. But,

Thirdly, I am to remove an objection or two, which have usually been brought against the doctrine here advanced; and,

First, If God be a Spirit, how and why then is it that he is so often represented to us in Scripture, by the parts and members of men, and, as having the passions of our common nature?

In answer whereto we say, that by the Scriptures affirming God to be a Spirit, we are directed to conceive of him as of a Being not limited by human shape, or as included under any other form whatever; and though we find him so often in scripture to have the members of a body, and the parts thereof frequently ascribed to him, yet must we remember, that this is only done "in condescension to our "weakness," who (having all our knowledge originally from the objects of our senses) can have no notions of any thing but by comparing them with some things which do occur to our senses.

We are not able to have any conceptions of spiritual Beings, otherwise than by such things as we by our senses perceive; and

Whereas the glories of another world are represented to us by the pleasures, and honours, and

and riches, and other gratifications of this present life, (without which representations we should be necessarily wholly ignorant of them) so, in like manner, are the operations of the divine nature, by a gracious condescension, signified to us by a likeness to the operations which we perform by our faculties and members.

This may signify to us the acts of God, as they bear some likeness to those performed by us: more immediately noting to us his visible operations, rather than his invisible nature.

It is certain, however, that we must not conceive of God according to the letter, but the true intent of such expressions, who is nevertheless a pure spirit, without all corporeity, and entirely remote from the conditions of a body, which are in no way consistent with infinite perfection.

In the darker and more ignorant ages of the Church, there were some, who (from a misunderstanding of some of the expressions of their predecessors) maintained the doctrine of God's real corporeity; but, notwithstanding this, it is certain that there are none now so ignorant, who are arrived at years of any understanding, as to think that God hath really a human, or any other shape; yet, because, in expressing the several powers of God, and his different

manners of acting, all language is so deficient, that we are forced to make use of figurative ways of speaking, and of similitudes drawn from our own manners of acting, to represent our conceptions of these divine powers to which the faculties of man bear but a very small and imperfect analogy. It is, therefore, very necessary (for preventing mistakes in this matter) that we attend, with some care, to the true meaning of those many passages in Scripture, which, (in condescension to the us), do thus speak concerning God after this figurative manner.

For example:—When the Scripture, speaking of him, who, being an infinite mind, is therefore really present in every place alike, yet represents him as being in Heaven, and as dwelling or sitting there, and having the earth for his footstool; this ought to be understood only as a description of his supreme authority and dominion over all. When mention is made of the eyes of him who hath no parts, this must be understood of his perfect knowledge and discernment of all things, who, having made the eye, cannot but have in himself that power in a higher, and much more perfect manner, of which the eye, made by him, is only an instrument proportionate to the other short faculties of weak and finite creatures.

His

His looking down upon the earth signifies not any posture, which is the property of bodies only, but his watchful providence, and continual inspection over all events.

When mention is made of his ear, and of his bowing down his ear towards men; this sets forth to us his willingness and readiness to be moved by the prayers of his servants, which prayers he, who made the ear, knows and understands by the same perfect power by which he discerns the heart, as well as the utterance; which power, nevertheless, we, (through defect of language), can no otherwise express, than by saying that he hears us.

Arms and hands being in men the instruments of action, and the seat of strength, signify (when applied to God) his power and might.

“Smelling a sweet favour” is nothing but an Hebrew phrase, from the law of sacrifices, to express God’s acceptance of the services of his sincere worshippers; and the mention of his mouth and lips, so frequently found in Scripture, is evidently nothing else but a familiar metaphor, to signify his revealing in what manner soever his will to mankind.

Indeed such figurative ways of speaking as these are so common in all languages, and so well understood upon numberless occasions, even in common speech, that the bare mention

of them is sufficient to prevent their being mistaken even by the meanest capacities. But,

Secondly, It is objected and said, that “if God be a Spirit of no compound matter or parts,” how is it that he could talk “face to face” with the holy men of old, as he in Scripture is said to have done?

This phrase may, in the first place, import the clearness and fullness of our knowledge of God, and the familiarity and plainness that he used in speaking to them; as, in those words of St. Paul, “Now we see, as thro’ a glass, darkly, but then face to face;” then shall “we see even as we are seen, and know even as we are known,” (i. e.) clearly and plainly.

Thus is God said to speak to Moses “face to face,” (i. e.) from the cloud apparently, and not in dark speeches. But further,

It is certain, in the nature of things, that the essence of a pure spirit is absolutely impossible to be seen; and moreover, in Scripture, the God and Father of all is peculiarly distinguished by that particular attribute, that he is the “Invisible God,” “whom no man has seen at any time;” “whom no man hath seen, nor can see;” meaning in this mortal state; and of whom our Saviour affirms,

firms to the Jews, that “they had neither
“seen his shape, nor heard his voice.”

Concerning the appearance of God, therefore, in the Old Testament, 'tis observable, that generally, and for the most part, in order to prevent mistakes, and that men might not imagine it was God himself that appeared, but only a Glory, to represent his appearance; there was no particular shape or form seen in that Glory.

This is evident from that saying of Moses to all the people, viz. “the Lord talked with
“you face to face, in the mount;” and yet he expressly saith to them, “Ye heard indeed
“his voice, but saw no similitude.”

Besides, and that no man might be so weak, or so perverse, as to take those expressions according to the letter, and thereby entertain mean and unworthy thoughts of his maker, the same Scriptures often add to those very descriptions something of high and peculiar eminence, whereby manifestly to shew how they are to be understood.

Add to this, what hath been already said concerning the explication of these phrases.

But yet, because it was sometimes plainly otherwise, and the Lord that appeared, is, in some places, undeniably represented as under an human shape, viz. as when Adam “heard
“the

“the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day ; and Abraham talked with the Lord, as with one of the three men, whom he saw going toward Sodom.” And of Moses it is related, that “the Lord spake unto him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend ;” and of the Elders of Israel, that “they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the body of Heaven in its clearness.” And the prophets Micah, Isaiah, and Daniel, saw in their visions “the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all “the host of Heaven standing about him on his right hand, and on his left.”

For the full explication of the matter, and the clear reconciling these texts of Scripture, with other express texts, and with the reason of things, which do both of them undeniably prove that the essence of God, the Father of all, cannot but be absolutely invisible, it is here further to be observed, that all these appearances of God in the Old Testament, wherein he seems to have been represented as in an human form, and all those other appearances also wherein there was seen only a Glory, were in reality none other than “the angel of the Covenant ;” even Christ himself, who from the beginning appeared in a bodily Glory, having

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(as St. Paul expresses it) "the form of God," and being the visible image of the invisible God, representing the supreme Majesty of the Father, and acting in his name, and, as his word. Thus St. Stephen expressly: There "appeared to Moses in the wilderness the Angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush."

"The Angel of the Lord," (i. e.) "the Angel of his presence, the great messenger of his Covenant," as our Saviour is styled; and this, it is very probable, was not altogether unknown to those eminent prophets under the Old Testament, to whom God was pleased to reveal himself more distinctly. That the person who appeared to Adam in Paradise was that second Adam, who is the Lord from Heaven."

That the Lord, who talked familiarly with Abraham, was he "whose day Abraham earnestly desired to see, and he saw it, and was glad." And

That the Lord, who spake to Moses "face to face, as a man talketh with his friend," was he in whom (at length) was fulfilled the law and the prophets, by whom was "revealed openly Grace and Truth."

Thirdly, It is further objected and said, that if God be a Spirit, how is it that man was said

to be made after the image of God, of which there can be no likeness nor resemblance?

We answer, man is not said to be made after the image of God in respect to the outward form and features of his body, but rather, as to his spiritual faculties: or, as to that righteousness and holiness in which he was first created; and so, not as to what is seen of him, but as to what is not seen, he being created after God, “after the image of God, in righteousness and “true holiness;” or rather,

Not as to his nature, but as to his state, by reason of the dominion he obtained over all the creatures; for, thus it is written, “God “created man after his image, and said unto “him, have dominion over the fish of the sea, “and the fowls of the air, and over every “thing that moveth upon the face of the “earth.”

Having thus explained the proposition, and maintained it, I shall now,

Lastly, see what inferences can be drawn from the same.

First, Is God a Spirit? then is he immortal and eternal.—This flows from the spirituality of his nature; for,

A spiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish or die. This doth so eminently agree to God
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(either because he is purely spiritual and immaterial, or because he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is originally and independently so), that the Apostle attributes it to him, in a singular and peculiar manner, "who only hath immortality."

Secondly, If God be a Spirit, then are we to conceive of him aright, (i. e.) we are so to conceive of him, as a Being without any parts, or corporeal subsistence.

This was the gross error and conceit of some who grounded it upon the literal interpretation of many figurative speeches interspersed here and there concerning God in Scripture, as, where it speaks of him as having the parts and passions of men.

But herein we are very unthankful to God, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our capacities, if we abuse this condescension of his, to the blemish and reproach of the Divine Nature. If God be pleased to stoop to our weakness, we must not therefore level him to our infirmities.

God is a Spirit, consequently he is not a corporeal Being, nor can he be the object of the human senses; "He is the invisible God, whom no man hath seen, nor can see at any time."

What

What our Saviour here affirms of the spirituality of the Divine Nature, was never before delivered as a doctrine of religion.

For, though the Spirit of God is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, yet our blessed Saviour was the first who informed mankind that "God is a Spirit," not concealing so sublime a truth from a woman; a proper foundation thus to remove all superstition and idolatry out of the world, and therefore most fit for him to reveal, who came with full authority from God, universally to reform the mistakes of men, in things relating to God, and to introduce the most perfect way of worshipping him.

He, therefore, who came to instruct men of all capacities in divine truths, delivered this doctrine in a plain proposition, to be believed upon his authority, and the testimonies of holy writ. But,

Thirdly, If God be a Spirit, then we are not to worship him by any image, or sensible representation. This should shew us the folly of pretending to represent God by any image, and of our obligation to elevate and refine our notions of him all we can. Because "God is a Spirit," therefore we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent him by "the likeness of any thing

“ thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in
“ the earth beneath, or in the waters under the
“ earth,” as it is given us in the second Com-
mandment; for (as the Prophet tells us) there
is nothing that we can liken God to. “ To
“ whom will ye liken me (saith the Lord),
“ and to whom will ye make me equal, that
“ we may be alike?” — “ To whom will ye
“ liken him, and what likeness will ye com-
“ pare unto him?

We debase his spiritual and incorruptible
nature, when we compare him to corruptible
creatures. St. Paul (speaking of the Heathen
Idolatry) says, that they “ professing them-
“ selves wise, became fools, by changing the
“ glory of the incorruptible God into an
“ image, made like unto corruptible man,
“ and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and
“ creeping things, they became fools.” This
is the folly of Idolatry, to liken a Spirit which
hath no bodily shape, to things that are cor-
poreal and corruptible.

Fourthly, If God be a Spirit, then we
“ must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

This is the inference which our Saviour here
makes in my text.

To worship God “ in spirit and in truth,”
is to worship him with an inward and real
service, (i. e.) in opposition to those lef-

types, which were only shadows of good things to come, in opposition to the false worship of him by images, and to that feigned service of him which is not performed in sincerity and truth, or to a bare profession of that service which we do not perform. If we would worship God in spirit and in truth, we must be attentive when we address ourselves to him, and appear in his presence.

This is a duty in which we are too often deficient, and our defects of this kind proceed from coldness and indifference to things sacred and serious ; and from a too great fondness for the world, and for sensible objects, hereby changing the spiritual worship of God, into acts merely ceremonial, or into something that deserveth not even that name ; into something lower and meaner than any part of that ceremonial worship, which the Gospel hath long since abolished, as useless and imperfect. We hereby act almost like those prophane Jews, who, having vowed a sacrifice, chose for that purpose, the blind, and the lame, and the refuse of the flock : “Offer such unto thy Governor, will he be pleased with thee, or “will he accept thy person ?”

Not much unlike to this is the behaviour of those who present to God “the sacrifice of “fools,” sounds without sense, words without

out meaning, and a body without a soul, whose very shew of devotion is blameable, and ought to be concluded with an acknowledgment of the fault, which they have committed in it ; and a real and sincere petition to God, to forgive those prayers which they have been uttering with heedlessness and irreverence.

This is not to worship God in Spirit, much less in Truth ; it is rather not to worship him in any sense ; it is to have no notion of his supreme Majesty and Authority, or of his presence with us ; or of our own wants and weakness, and dependence upon him : One serious thought of which would be sufficient to dispel all other thoughts, and make us as attentive, and as much, yea more, in earnest, than when we endeavour to make ourselves acceptable to men, or seek to acquire the necessary accommodations of this life.

It therefore concerns us, if ever we desire that our prayers and praises, our professions and resolutions of obedience, our vows and oblations should be acceptable to that God, who loves and requires truth in the inward parts ; it concerns us to see to it, that we are sincere, hearty, and faithful to our professions, and punctual in the performance of the vows and promises which we have made unto that

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God, who will not be mocked, and who cannot be imposed upon by falsehood and hypocrisy.

Holy David summons every faculty and affection of his soul, all that is within him, to do homage to God, well knowing that a mere outward shew would be an useless performance to that God “ who requireth truth in the inward parts, to whom all things are naked and open, and who trieth the very hearts and reins.” “ Bless the Lord, O my soul, says he, and all that is within me, blefs his holy name.”

We cannot impose upon God as we do upon men, by a “ mere form of godliness without the power thereof.”

When, therefore, we perform any part of our duty to God, we must give him our heart, or all will prove a vain oblation.

Besides what hath been already said, we may further advance from the words before us, that not only a spiritual devotion in prayer is hereby required, but also suitable acts and acknowledgments of the mind in every state and condition of life, is implied.

To worship God in Spirit, is to worship him by such spiritual actions as God and ourselves can only know; such as are reverent and honourable thoughts of him, love of his infinite goodness, fear of his holy justice, faith in his

his word, reliance upon his wisdom, and power, and providence, and an humble resignation to his divine will : these, and the like, are the immediate actions of our minds, and reasonable natures ; and, when we are thus affected towards God, and make a real acknowledgment of his perfections by a suitable temper and disposition of mind, then it is that we worship God with our spirits.

For, this is to honour and worship him, not in words and pretence, but in deed and in truth, with the heart and understanding, and with all the powers and faculties of the soul ; and therefore, consequently, must be the most rational and acceptable service to him : But

Let it be here observed, that the consequence doth not solely lie in this, that just such as God is, such therefore must our worship of him be ; no—for this would exclude all bodily, all outward worship of him. Our Saviour's argument is this : “God is a Spirit,” (i. e.) the most excellent nature and being, and therefore must be served with the best.

But, as we consist of body and soul, we must therefore serve him with both, (i. e.) with our whole man, but principally with our souls, which are the most excellent part of ourselves.

To worship God, "in spirit and in truth," is, in general, to pay him a rational service, a service suitable both to his nature and to our own, who are reasonable rational creatures.

We must not, therefore, think to put off God with external observance, and with bodily reverence and attendance only; this we must give him, but we must principally regard that our service of him be reasonable, (i. e.) directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our affections.

External worship, without internal devotion, profiteth but little; the devotion of the hand, without that of the heart, is of no acceptance with God. "Ridily exercise profiteth but little," unless accompanied with an holy warmth, and a devout elevation of mind.

Indeed, if we did worship God only to be seen of men, a pompous and external worship would be very suitable to such an end; but religion is not intended to please men, but God, and therefore must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

God is a pure Spirit, present to our souls, intimate to all our thoughts, and conscious to our most secret and retired motions: As therefore we serve the searcher of hearts, we should serve him with all sincerity.

I shall

I shall conclude all with laying before you a caution truly necessary, in order to the due performance of the duty before us.

It is absolutely necessary that we should be pure both in body and mind; or, in the words of Scripture more properly, that we “be cleansed from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,” from all indulgence to those carnal lustings, and sensual actions, which defile the body, and pollute that vessel, which being consecrated as the temple of the Holy Ghost should be “kept in sanctification and honour,” free from all spiritual defilements whatever, whether of pride or malice, whether of envy or wrath, or whatever other is enmity to the pure and holy will of God; such as are all bitterness of spirit, impure thoughts, and evil concupiscence, all inordinate affections, and prevailing love to the interests, the honours, and pleasures of the world; for, almost all these vices are put into the catalogue of “fleshly lusts, which war against the spirit.”

Now, “they that are in the flesh,” i. e. they that do the works of the flesh, saith the Apostle, “cannot please God” by any service they perform; for by these things “the mind and conscience is defiled;” and from a fountain thus impure can proceed nothing that is clean, and therefore nothing that is acceptable

to

to that God, " who requireth truth in the inward parts," and orders us to come before him with clean hands, and with a pure heart.

If, therefore, we would serve the Lord agreeable to his nature, we must " cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light;" for, without this, it is impossible to serve him as we ought, in pureness and fervency of spirit, for " the carnal mind is enmity against God;" and, " no man can serve two masters."

These things being duly considered, must surely influence us to the right worship of our Maker, and cause that we, at all times, serve him from spiritual principles, and for spiritual ends, always remembering that " he is a spirit, and that they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

* See Discourse on Fervency in Devotion, vol. 5.

SERMON IV.

Of the Omnipresence of God, &c.

PSALM CXXXIX. 6. "Whither shall I go then
" from thy Presence?"

WE have in this Psalm a magnificent description of some of the perfections of the Almighty; amongst which, the author thereof, in admiration of his omnipresence, with astonishment exclaims in the words before us, "Whither shall I go then from thy presence?"

By which we are to understand, that God is present in all places, so that wherever we go, there he is; which we may easily conceive from the spirituality of his nature, which is infinite, and thereby capable of universal inspection.

We cannot then fly from his presence: "If we take the wings of the morning, and fly into the remotest parts of the earth," which are unknown to us, yet would God be present there,

there, and we should be equally led and uphelden by him."

God then is a Being of immense essence, infinite, and present in all places.

In speaking to this Attribute of God, (his Omnipresence) I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand thereby.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God; and then,

Lastly, See what improvements can be drawn from the same.

First, I am to shew what we are to understand by the Atiribute before us, the Omnipresence of God.

God's presence, in the holy Scriptures, hath various imports;

First, His majestic presence, as surrounded with light, and with an host of Angels.

In this sense God is frequently said to "dwell on high, and Heaven is styled his throne;" he is said to "sit in Heaven," because he dwells there in light inaccessible, and hath the holy Angels continually standing before him. This is (as St. Jude says) the presence of his glory, and in this sense the Psalmist saith, "in thy presence there is fullness of joy;" and the Apostle, that "Christ is entered "into Heaven, now to appear in the presence "of God for us."

Secondly,

Secondly, His providential presence, as when he is in a special and extraordinary manner present to exert his power, or give some other demonstration of his providence towards the sons of men ; and in this sense he is present ; first, in a way of judgement to chastise sinners. Thus did he appear to exercise his tremendous judgements on Pharaoh and his host, who followed the Israelites into the Red Sea ; and on Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, with the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense with them ; and thus God represents himself to his own people, as one that went before them as a consuming fire, to destroy their enemies, whilst his servants obeyed him.

Thirdly, This presence is more frequently mentioned in a way of mercy and favour to his people.

It is highly probable that he who required services, and received sacrifices from men, from the beginning, gave them some visible token of his presence with them, when they met to serve him.

For, though God is not present now in the assemblies of his Saints in such a visible and extraordinary manner, as then he was ; yet have we still sufficient reason to expect his gracious presence by the effectual operation of his holy word and spirit.

Our

Our Lord himself hath promised, that
“where two or three are gathered together in
“his name, there he is in the midst of them.”
And that he would be with his Ministers,
“teaching the things which he had command-
“ed, alway, even to the end of the world.”

St. Paul also hath assured us, that when he
ascended up on high, “he gave some Apostles,
“some Prophets, some Evangelists, some Ras-
“tors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the
“Saints, for the work of the Ministry; for
“the edifying of the body of Christ, till we
“all come in the unity of the Faith, and of
“the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a
“perfect man.”

Again, The Scripture saith that God is
present every where by his power and essence,
whence this is stiled his essential presence;
and of this presence the Psalmist treateth in
the words of my text; for he here speaketh of
the presence which cannot be avoided by our
ascending into Heaven, or our descending into
Hell, or the grave, “where all things are forgot-
“ten,” and where the dead are invisible: or,
by our flight into the remotest parts of the earth
or even the lowest place of the great and pro-
found deep.

So that from hence we may observe this
doctrine, “that though God’s glorious pre-

“sence

“sence be in Heaven, yet he is also every
“where present, by virtue of his power and
“essence, i. e. he is so present in every place,
“that nothing can exclude him from being
“present with us.”

When we are in our secret closets he hears us, or in our secret chambers (doing deeds of iniquity) he cannot be excluded from us; for his enquiry runs thus: “Can any hide themselves in secret places, where I cannot find them? Do not I fill Heaven and earth (saith the Lord)?” “There is not a thought conceived in our heart, but he knoweth it altogether,” for “he knoweth our thoughts long before they are conceived in us, and spieth out all our ways.”

The darkness may cover us from the eyes of men, when we are doing the deeds of darkness, but it can never conceal us from God's all-seeing eye, to whom “the darkness and light are both alike.”

He is present in all places, so that we cannot get beyond him. He is so present in all places, both in Heaven and Earth, as not to be confined by any, so as that we may say, “hither he reacheth, and no further;” for he fills Heaven and Earth, and if there be any space beyond them, he is there also.

By the Omnipresence of God, therefore, we are to understand that his Being hath no bounds nor limits, but doth every where diffuse itself beyond what we can imagine, so that we cannot say, "lo here, or lo there," or, "thus far shalt thou come, and no further;" for he is every where present, after a most infinite manner: yea, this attribute of his is a perfection, whose centre is every where, and circumference is no where: Not even the most private recesses, or distant places, are without him.

It is here proper to observe, how weak have been the scruples of such persons who have been afraid to acknowledge the true notion of the Divine Omnipresence, lest they should seem to diminish from the glory and majesty of God, by supposing him always to be actually present in all, even the most impure places.

They who have raised to themselves this difficulty, have not been aware, that as the beams of the sun are not at all soiled by the matter upon which they shine; and as the purity and holiness of the Divine Nature is not in the least diminished by beholding all the wickedness and moral impurity which is acted in the world, so the Omnipresent Essence of God is not at all affected by any natural impurity of things or places whatsoever, it being the superlative excellency and prerogative of his nature,

to

to act always, every where, upon all things, and itself to be acted upon by nothing.

Thus much as to the import of the word, the Omnipresence of God.

Secondly, I am to prove that this attribute belongs to God.

Now this will evidently appear to us, whether we consult natural reason, or divine revelation.

That God is omnipresent is sufficiently evident, from the natural notions and dictates of our minds.

In order to prove the truth of the assertion itself, that "God must of necessity be omnipresent," it is to be observed (and it may easily be apprehended by the meanest capacities), that if being or existence be at all a perfection (as it is manifestly the foundation of all other perfections), it will follow, that to exist through larger periods of time, and portions of space, is, the having a greater degree of this perfection.

And as that Being (which is absolutely perfect) must, with regard to duration, be eternal, so, in respect of greatness, must likewise be immense, otherwise its perfections will be limited, which is the notion of imperfection.

He, therefore, who will frame to himself a true idea of this divine attribute (so far as a

finite understanding can comprehend what is infinite) must in this, as in all others of the divine perfections, form in his mind the completest notion thereof, and, by enlarging this perfection to its utmost possibility, must consequently ascribe to God (the most perfect of Beings) infinity and immensity, i. e. we must conceive of him as of a Being that fills all things, and that contains all things within its own boundless nature, and, that it is not defined or circumscribed by any space, but co-exists with, and is present with all things, and infinitely beyond whatever we can imagine, without limits, and without bounds, “in whom (as the Apostle expresseth it) we live and move, and have our being,” and in whom all things subsist.

We find that the Heathens (by the light of nature) did attribute this perfection to God, for, say they, “God is, as it were, a soul passing through, and inspiring all nature.”

Again, “men ought to believe that the Gods see all things, and that all things are full of them;” “He is every where present, and at hand.” “Which way soever thou turnest thyself, thou shalt find him meeting thee.” “Nothing is without him, for he every where fills his own work;” not much differing from

from the expression of the Psalmist in the words before us.

God must of necessity be present with the things that he made and governs: our reason must convince us, that he who works in all places must be where he works; it being inconceivable how any thing should operate where it is not, especially in such a Being, whose operations are not easily distinguished from his essence.

Since then God is every where present, by the effects of his power, as all men do acknowledge, by praying (in all places) for his assistance, he must be also present with them by his essence.

Moreover, since he is present by his providence, preserving, moving, and directing all his creatures; seeing the exercise of his providence seems plainly to require the knowledge of all things, and the power to do all things, it seems as plainly to require his essential presence. For,

To have a perfect knowledge of, and the power to do all things, even those things which are most secret, and which depend upon the inward motions of a man's heart, and to have a perfect care of them, seems plainly to require immediate presence. In a word,

He who made all things, as he could not but be before the things that he made ; so he must be present also with the things that he made and governs : For

Things could not be without the actual presence of the power that made them ; nor can any thing be governed with any certainty, unless the wisdom that governs them be also present with them.

Whatever arguments therefore prove the being of God, and his unerring providence, must also be understood to prove likewise his actual Omnipresence.

But further, He who exists by necessity of nature (which is the character of God) must manifestly exist in all places alike ; for, absolute necessity is, at all times, and in all places, the same. Whatever can be absent at any time, may be absent at all times ; and whatever can be absent from one place, may also be absent from another, and consequently can have no necessity of existing at all.

He, therefore, who exists necessarily, must necessarily exist always, and every where, i. e. as he must, in duration, be eternal, so must he also in immensity be omnipresent.

Concerning the manner how God is present every where, we cannot possibly form to ourselves any clear notion.

We

We are indeed sensible that we have souls, which think and act, and are present where they think and act; and yet the manner in which they are present is unknown even to themselves.

If therefore to ourselves we are unknown, how much more ignorant must we be of the immensity of the Almighty?

It is in vain to attempt what is unsearchable; all that we can do is to avoid false and mean notions concerning it.

We must not imagine that God hath any visible parts or shape, or is present in a bodily manner, or that he is more present in one place than another, being (in himself) wholly a pure mind, and thereby capable of infinite inspection.

When any thing is said of God's particular presence, in Scripture, the meaning is, that extraordinary manifestations of his glory were there made.

The justest notion, therefore, that we can form to ourselves of God's omnipresence is, that he is present every where in knowledge and power, i. e. that he knows all things, and that he every where can do all things.

"Can any hide himself in secret places that
"I cannot see him? Do not I fill Heaven and
"earth, saith the Lord?"

What

What hath been already said concerning the right notion of the Omnipresence of God, will very much assist us to obviate their objection, who deny the general inspection of God's providence over his creatures.

This is a mistake, arising from the want of having a true notion of the Divine Omnipresence. For,

That perfection being once rightly understood, it cannot but be evident, but that all things are alike easy to be inspected by him, the minutest as well as the greatest; nay, it will appear, that not only the smallest things are not unworthy his inspection, or tedious for him, but that even, in the nature of things, it is absolutely impossible but that he, who is every where alike present, should observe and attend to every thing alike.

There is a certain determinate number or quantity of things, which every intelligent creature, according to the proportion of its sphere of power and activity, is able to attend to. And by this we may judge, that as creatures of larger capacities can observe a much greater number of things at one and the same time, than beings of a lower rank can imagine it possible they should,—so God, who is completely perfect, and present every where, can with infinitely greater ease direct and govern all

all things in the world at once, than we, or even the wisest among us, can attend to those few things which fall within the compass of our short observation. But,

Secondly, This Omnipresence of God seems to be written with sun-beams in the holy Scriptures, which are a rule of our faith: as

First, The Scripture saith expressly, that we cannot possibly avoid either his knowledge or presence, nor get into that place, though ever so remote from Heaven, where his hand cannot reach us; and therefore God thus speaks to the Idolaters, "though they dig into Hell, thence shall my hand take them; though they climb up into Heaven, yet thence will I pull them down;" and, in my text, "Whither shall I go then from thy presence?"

Secondly, There are expressions which assure us that God fills Heaven and earth, and therefore cannot be confined to any place.

Thus, when God filled the temple with his glorious presence, Solomon speaks in admiration of him, "Behold the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain him, how much less the place that I have built?" and

God himself speaks by his Prophet thus: "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him?" "Do not I fill Heaven and

and Earth?" Now knowledge is not said to fill, but presence only.

And, of like nature are those words, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."

Thirdly, There are expressions which assert this presence of his with us all, as doth that question, "Am I a God at hand, and not afar off?" And those words of the Apostle, "God is not far from any of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being."

Now, he that doth constantly preserve, sustain, and move us, must be for ever with us. But,

Lastly, I am to see what improvements can be made from what hath been thus laid before you. And here this doctrine is profitable for information and instruction, for exhortation and consolation. As,

First, Is God omnipresent? Then hence it follows, that he is to be worshipped and revered every where, in private as well as in public.

Honour is to be paid him, not only by Angels before his throne in Heaven, and by the congregation publickly in his temple on earth, but also by every man singly in his most private retirements.

"God

“ God dwelleth not in temples made with
“ hands;” (i. e.) he is not present there only,
but sees also that more retired part of our beha-
viour which is concealed from the world, and
most of all approves that private piety and vir-
tue which cannot proceed but from a sincere
mind, because it is not capable of the applause
of men.

“ When thou prayest (saith our blessed Sa-
“ viour) enter into thy closet, and pray to thy
“ Father, which is in secret, and thy Father
“ which seeth in secret, shall reward thee
“ openly.”

But further, Is this the property of God to
be present every where? then,

Secondly, we may hence be assured, that he
is also omniscient, and “ knoweth all things.”
He beholds not only our most private retire-
ments, but also that which is still more secret
than these, even the very thoughts and intents
of our hearts, that inward frame and disposi-
tion of mind, which may be dissembled, and
entirely concealed from men.

Hence is it, that he is styled in Scripture
“ the searcher of the hearts and reins;” nor are
there any passages in Holy Writ which do more
worthily and magnificently represent him, than
those which thus describe him, sitting in the
circuit of Heaven, and beholding at one view
all

all the actions, and all the thoughts of all men throughout the whole world. “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good :” “Hell and destruction are before him, how much more then the hearts of the children of men ?”

If God be every where, then he knoweth all things, yea even “the hidden things of darkness and dishonesty,” and the secrets of our hearts : yea,

Nothing can be hid from an infinite eye ; he is present to our thoughts, and intimate to the deepest recesses of our hearts, for “in him we live and move, and have our being.” Surely then “there is not a thought in our heart but he knoweth it altogether,” as being so intimately present with us.

Hence God argues thus : “Can any hide himself in secret that I shall not see him ? Do not I fill Heaven and earth ?”

Of this the Psalmist here takes notice, when he makes this inference from God’s presence with him : “Thou knowest my thoughts long before.” Again,

Hence we may be assured of his providence, that he observes, regards, and orders the actions of all men. For,

Can we think that he, who is thus present with our hearts, can be regardless of the motions

tions of them? That he who is still present to behold our actions, should take no notice of them? That he who is all ear to hear our words, should not observe the falsehood, the blasphemy, and prophaneness of them? If we should see God present with us, we should not doubt of it; wherefore then should we not regard it, when both Scripture, and reason, and tradition, so inform us?

Hence also we may learn, that God is incomprehensible.

This is the use which the Psalmist makes of this assertion: "Thou (saith he) hast beset me behind and before; such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I can not attain unto it."

That which is infinite cannot be measured or comprehended by that which is finite.

Again, Hence also we may be convinced of God's Omnipotence, that "he can do all things,"

Distance limits the power of creatures, and makes their hands short; but God is every where, nothing therefore is out of his reach.

This also the Psalmist intimates at the tenth verse: "Even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." But,

Secondly, The consideration of God's Omnipresence may be improved as a most power-

ful restraint from sin, and an inducement to obedience.

The consideration of God's Omnipresence (seriously meditated on) will teach us to behave ourselves at all times, and in all places, with circumspection and care, as in the presence of our judge, who certainly observes us, and in due time will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and will then render to every man according to his works." It will teach us to be as much afraid of committing any sin or impurity in secret, as in the face of the sun, and in the presence of all mankind; considering that our most private misdeeds are set before him, and our "secret sins in the light of his countenance"; and that all the wickedness which men now commit in private, will one day be published before all the inhabitants of Heaven and Earth.

It will oblige us to govern even our very thoughts and desires, and to endeavour to keep them in continual subjection to the law of God, seeing that he who "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" without punishing it, searches even our very hearts and reins with his intimate presence, and all-seeing eye.

It is a sublime description which the Psalmist here gives of the presence, and knowledge, and power

power of God." "If I climb up into Heaven,
" thou art there; if I go down to Hell, thou
" art there also."

"If I take the wings of the morning, and
" remain in the uttermost parts of the sea,
" even there also shall thy hand lead me, and
" thy right hand shall hold me."

"If I say, peradventure, the darkness shall
" cover me, then shall my night be turned to
" day."

"Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee,
" but the night is as clear as the day." "The
" darkness and light to thee are both alike:
" for, my reins are thine, and thou hast cov-
" ered me in my mother's womb."

No distance or darkness can seclude us from him.

This consideration alone (if but duly attended to) should, one would think, be sufficient to put a stop not only to the external acts of sin, but also to the very first motions and tendencies towards it.

Sin is so shameful in itself, and so much below the dignity of human nature, that all (except such as glory in their shame) endeavour to keep it as private as they can. But,

To what end are we so careful to conceal our vices, or even the least indecencies we are

guilty of from the eyes of men, when the eye of God is always upon us, when we can go no where from his presence, and when all things are naked and open before him ?

If the presence of a man (like ourselves), yea, or even of a child, be sometimes sufficient to restrain us from a sinful or indecent action, how much more careful ought we to be of our behaviour before that holy and divine Majesty, who fills Heaven and earth, and whose notice nothing can escape ?

Did men but live under this apprehension, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked.

But the consideration of this should especially restrain us from the commission of those sins in which men do more securely and unrestrainedly indulge themselves by reason of their privacy.

This is the use which the Psalmist here makes of it :

If we believe that “ God searches and “ knows us, that he knows our down-sitting “ and our up-rising, and understands our “ thoughts afar off ; that there is not a word “ in our tongue but he knoweth it altogether ; ” If we believe this, in what awe should we then live of the Divine Majesty, which is always present

S E R M O N IV.

for

present with us, and is as inseparable from us as we from ourselves!

Did men but thoroughly believe this, they would be so far from “ devising mischief in “ their hearts,” that they would (as the expression of the wise man is) be in the fear of “ the Lord all the day long.”

The main hope of sinners is to remain concealed ; if we are but privy to their designs, they are utterly disappointed.

It is therefore fit that the mind of man should have an awful sense of some Being, whose authority may render even privacy itself solemn and sacred.

The character of wicked men is, “ that they “ have not God before their eyes.” One great cause of all the wickedness and violence upon the earth is, they do not believe that God is near them.

We ought, therefore, frequently to call to mind those very plain and obvious truths (however awful and awakening) contained in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, “ Am I a God at “ hand (saith the Lord), and not a God afar “ off? Do not I fill Heaven and earth?”

No one, therefore, can hide himself in secret places, that he cannot see him. God is every where present in knowledge, to ascertain the thoughts of our hearts, as well as the deeds

of our lives, and in power to punish and reward accordingly.

Should not then the consideration of these things lay a more powerful restraint from sin upon us than it generally does? especially as I am to consider,

Thirdly, That to sin thus before him, and in his presence, must be a great aggravation of our guilt, and is what will render our iniquity sinful indeed.

The Royal Psalmist dissolved himself into tears, his heart was pierced, and even broken upon the apprehension of his sin; his “sorrow” was continually before him, and he went “mourning all the day long;” for (saith he) “against thee only have I sinned, and done “this evil in thy sight.” This was the “arrow that stuck fast within him, and made “him roar through the very disquiet of his heart.”

And well indeed he might, since God resents this as a most heinous provocation, and worthy of his most tremendous judgments.

“I will recompense them into their bosom, “(saith the Lord) for ‘tis a people that provoke me to my very face.”

“I will number you to the sword, and you shall bow down to the slaughter, because “when

"when I spake you did not hear, but did evil
"before mine eyes."

What other can the man expect, who treats
God with contempt in his presence, and tram-
ples on his laws before his face, but to be
"recompensed to his face!"

How great must the provocation be, which
shews that we are wholly void of shame, of
fear, and reverence of his sacred Majesty, and
his all-seeing eye?

For, surely we hereby too apparently demon-
strate that we do very little reverence his sacred
presence, or dread his power and justice; and
that we even degrade his Majesty beneath that
of our fellow-creatures, when we dare venture
to do that under his eye, and in his presence,
which we abstain from doing in the presence of
a mortal man.

It would be better for a sinner not to believe
the Divine Presence, than after having believed
it, to go on sinning in a total disregard of it;
yea, in defiance thereto. But,

Secondly, As the consideration of God's
presence should deter us from sin, so should it
quicken and animate us in our duty.

It is commonly a great encouragement for
us to acquit ourselves handsomely, to have
the eyes of men upon us, especially of those
whose applause and approbation we value;
and

and is not the eye of God more piercing than that of man, and his praise above all commendation?

This, therefore, should engage us to perform our duty with the greatest zeal and fervency, as knowing that God sees with what intentions we engage in his services.

The consideration of the great Judge of Heaven and earth's being present with us, and beholding with what ardour we "strive for the mastery in all things," should (one would think) have a powerful influence to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure," "so to run, that we may obtain the prize; and not to faint, nor be weary in well doing".

The Heathens saw the excellency of this so well to promote virtue, that they advised men to set before their eyes some eminent virtuous person, and so to live, as though he always beheld their actions, and was ever present with them.

And surely the consideration of a righteous Judge still present with us, and taking notice of all we do, must be a much stronger motive to perform all our services in the best manner we are able.

That therefore we, who know that we stand before the living God, do all things in his sight,

fight, speak all things in his hearing, and think all things in his presence :

That we are not more fervent in our prayers, more serious and composed in our words, more pure and heavenly in our thoughts, must be ascribed to the want of this consideration, that God stands by us, and hath a view of all our proceedings, and that "in him we live and move, and have our Being."

Thirdly, The consideration of God's Omnipresence gives an abundant ground of comfort to all those who are his faithful servants, by encouraging their faith and confidence in him.

When we are in straits, in difficulties, and dangers, God is with us ; and if he be for us, what matters it who or what is against us ?

'Twas this that bore up David under all his troubles : "I have set the Lord always before me, for he is on my right hand, so that I shall not greatly fall."

The consideration of God's presence is the great stay and support of our faith : "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble ; therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed, and tho' the mountains shake at the tempest of the same."

In

In the greatest commotions therefore, in the most imminent and threatening dangers, this should charm and allay our fears, that "God is always at hand to help and protect us." This was the support of Moses's faith in his sufferings "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

To conclude, whenever we are under any trouble or pressure, we should rebuke our fears, and challenge our anxious thoughts with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, "and why art thou disquieted within me? "trust still in God :" for,

We are assured, that "whoever dwells under the defence of the most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty, shall not be afraid of any terror by night, nor for the arrow that fieth by day; for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that destroyeth at noon day."

Whoever believeth that God is with him, and that omnipotent goodness stands by him, to support, relieve, and protect him, when, and as it seems best to his wisdom, has all and every thing requisite to life and godliness; for,

It is his "sure trust, whereunto he may alway resort."

In

In a word, God is present to us all, as Creator, as Ruler, and Preserver, as he made, influences, and governs all things by his authority and power, by his knowledge and prudence. But,

There is another kind of Divine Presence, mentioned in the Scripture, of which our Saviour thus speaks: "If a man love me, him will my Father love, and we will come, and make our abode with him." And,

Blessed is he who can secure to himself this inestimable treasure, for whatever his condition be, "his heart will rejoice, and his joy no man can take from him."

SERMON V.

Of the Eternity of God, &c.

PSALM xc. 2. “*From Everlasting to Everlasting,
thou art God.*”

AS from the Spirituality of the Divine Nature we have inferred the Omnipresence of God, as being wholly a pure mind, and thereby capable of infinite inspection; so do we also his Eternity, as not consisting of matter, and so incapable of dissolution.

Moses (the author of this psalm) begins it with an acknowledgment of God’s Providence to his people, from the beginning of the world; “Thou, Lord, hast been our dwelling-place, “from all generations.” He was well acquainted with the history of the world, and the providence of God, from the beginning of the creation; and,

As if he had spoken too little of God, in saying that his providence had been exercised in all ages of the world, he tells us here, that
he

he was before the world was, and that he made it: he was from all eternity, and should continue to all ages the same. "Before the mountains were brought forth," (the most firm and durable parts of the world, the most eminent and conspicuous) "or ever the earth and the world were made," before any thing was created, "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." All the works of nature, and even nature itself had a beginning, and the instant they have attained their limited perfection, they approach towards a slow, but sure decline; revolving seasons soon fully their beauty, and the silent power of time gradually shakes their foundations, and at last levels them with the dust; whilst the Deity, the God of Nature, who made them all, himself unmade, remains uninjured, shining, unconscious of decay; "from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

In speaking to this perfection of the Deity, I shall,

First, shew the import of the phrase before us.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God; after which I shall,

Lastly, see what uses can be made herefrom, for the information of our judgments, and reformation of our lives.

First, I am to shew what we are to understand by the phrase before us, and the import thereof.

"From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." As we believe a God, so also we believe him to be eternal, according to the full and proper import of the word, as excluding both beginning and end, having no limitation of either.

The words which we render eternal, everlasting, and the like, when applied to persons, to things, to ordinances, or constitutions, imply a duration, which shall then only have an end, when these things cease to be; in which sense we read of eternal hills, and everlasting mountains, i. e. of hills and mountains which shall last as long as the earth shall endure; and of the Passover, and other ritual constitutions and observances of the law of Moses, that "this shall be an ordinance for ever," (i. e.) shall continue as long as the ritual law of Moses is in force, viz. until the time of reformation, and of the introduction of a better covenant. Thus God saith: "I have chosen this House, that my name may be there for ever." And again, "This shall be my rest for ever;" and yet he hath long since forsaken that place, and suffered it to be destroyed for ever, and thereby rendered it impossible for the Jews to perform those

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those sacrifices and oblations which were styled "ordinances for ever." But,

When Eternity is applied to God, it imports a duration which ever was, and ever will be, which never began, nor will ever end.

The Eternity of God (absolutely taken) comprehends both these, and signifies an infinite duration, in either respect; so that when we say God is eternal, we mean that he always was, and will be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor will ever have any end of days, but that he is “from everlasting to everlasting, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

It is true indeed, that as to God's Eternity, from the beginning, the Scripture doth not give us any account; it only tells us in general, that "God was before the world was, " and that he created it."

It doth not condescend to gratify our curiosity, in giving us an account of what God did before he made the world, or how he entertained himself from all eternity : it doth not give us any distinct account of his infinite duration, for that had been impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend : If we should have ascended upwards millions of ages, yet we should never have arrived at the height

thereof, nor have ascended up to the beginning of infinity.

The Scripture, therefore, which was wrote to instruct us in what was necessary, and not to satisfy our curiosity, tells us that God “was from everlasting, before the world “was, and that he laid the foundation there-“of;” and not only this, but that he will so continue to perpetual and endless generations, “without either beginning of time, or end of “days:” “From everlasting to everlasting, “thou art God.”

Secondly, I am to shew that this perfection belongs to God; and the method I shall take for the more full illustration of this point shall be,

First, To confirm it by the dictates of natural light; and then,

Secondly, By Scripture, or Divine Revelation.

First, from the dictates of natural light or reason.

This attribute of God is, of all others, the least disputed among the Philosophers: indeed all agree, that that God is a Being endued with all perfection, and possessed of perfect happiness; but wherein that happiness and perfection consist, they widely differ. They all agree that

God

God is eternal, and are as equally agreed what eternity is, viz. an endless duration.

The supreme God they looked upon as without beginning, and equally ascribed unto him a future Eternity. Yea,

And not only to Philosophers, but even to the meanest capacities, are there obvious arguments to prove clearly the necessity of this divine perfection, and to set it before them in a practical and useful light; for,

Since it is in some degree a perfection to be, and a greater degree of that perfection to continue in being, it is evident that when we conceive of God (the most perfect Being), we must conceive him to be infinite in this perfection also, as well as in others; and that as his power is not bounded by any opposite strength, nor his immensity terminated by any bounds of place, so neither is his duration limited by any periods of time; but, that he exists and lives, and governs all things, "from everlasting to everlasting," without beginning and without end.

It is evident even to the meanest capacity that he who first gave Being to all other things, must be before the things that he made, and could not therefore have any beginning himself, but must necessarily have existed from all eternity; and further,

That he who hath already existed from an eternity, and of himself, independently, cannot possibly be liable to be deprived of his Being, must therefore necessarily exist for an eternity to come. Besides, what further corroborates this is, that even they among the Heathens, who had the lowest and meanest conceptions of God, and who robbed him of as many perfections as their imperfect conceptions would permit them, are yet forced to attribute this to him, “how can “we conceive of God (say they) but as an “eternal Being?” And,

The reason of this is evident, for God being the Creator of all, could not receive his Being from them, for he must be before his workmanship. If he had at any time a beginning of existence, then He only that gave that being to him deserves to be called God; but, if nothing could give him his being, nothing is able to take it away; and consequently it must be “everlasting.”

Moreover, if God could cease to be, it must either be by some external cause that could destroy him, or by some internal principles, which would incline him to corruption, as the case is with human bodies; now,

He

He cannot cease to be from any outward cause, that can destroy him; if so, that cause would be more powerful; nor from any inward principles, for the Divine Nature is pure and uncompounded, spiritual, and undivided, and therefore can admit of no destruction, by the dissolution of those principles, of which it doth not consist.

Again, that God is everlasting is further evident, because it would be the greatest imperfection we could attribute to his Being; for the more perfect his Being otherwise is, the greater imperfection would it be for him to have an end; so excellent a nature to cease to be, would be an infinite abasement to all his other perfections.

Nay, it would hinder several of his perfections, and contradict their very being, viz. His self existence, had he not always been of himself; his necessary existence also; for, that is not necessary which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is.

It would further much abate the duty of the creature, as we could not have that assurance of his promise, and that security of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being (who is to be the disposer of them) were uncertain.

Now,

Now, these absurdities, and these inconveniences following from the denial of this perfection to God, is a sufficient evidence that it belongs unto him. But,

Secondly, I am to prove it from Scripture or Divine Revelation.

God is in Scripture stiled “the everlasting God;” as when St. Paul saith “the Gospel was made manifest according to the commandment of the everlasting God;” and “the everlasting or eternal King,” “because his dominion endureth throughout all ages.” And whereas all earthly kingdoms have their rise and fall, “his kingdom shall have no end.”

Again, he is declared to be God “from everlasting to everlasting.” Now this expression (say the Jewish Doctors) is the constant phrase, whereby they, with the Scripture, signify what is most properly eternal.

So saith the Psalmist in my text: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made,” “from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

But further, there are innumerable places which speak of the eternity of God directly. “Thou art the everlasting God,” “the eternal God;” and (which is to the same purpose) he that inhabiteth eternity.”

And

And this, as it is attributed to his Being, so likewise is it in respect of all his other perfections : “ The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, for his mercy endureth for ever.” “ His eternal power ; ” “ the King eternal.”

Those doxologies which the Scriptures use are but so many acknowledgments of this attribute. “ Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever : ” “ to whom be glory and honour, and dominion, for ever and ever : ” and many other such like expressions.

Hither we may refer all those places which speak of him as without beginning : “ Thou, O Lord, art from everlasting.”

And those which speak of his perpetual duration, viz. “ Thy years are throughout all generations ; of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the Heavens are the works of thy hands ; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure, yea, they shall all of them wax old like a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed ; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

And those which speak of him as the first and the last : “ Before me (saith God by his Prophet Isaiah) there was no God, neither shall there be any after me : ” “ I am the first, and

" and I am the last, and besides me there is
" no God ;" and,

To mention no more, those which speak of his Being as co-existent to all difference of time, past, present, and to come. " I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (saith the Lord), which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." God then is " without beginning of time or end of days :" " from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." But,

Lastly, I am to see what inferences and improvements can be made herefrom, for the information of our judgments, and reformation of our lives. And,

First, for the information of our judgments ; and here,

Is God eternal ? Then hence it will follow that he is independent in his Being, and in all his Perfections. For

He that is the first of Beings, could not receive his Being, nor any other of his excellent qualifications, which necessarily exist with it, from any other that received his Being after him, seeing the cause must be before the effect ; whereas it is a contradiction to affirm that any other Being can be before the first, according to that enquiry of the Apostle, " who hath first given to him, that he may repay him, for of

"of him, and from him, and to him, are all things." But

Secondly, Is it the property of God to be eternal? Then,

Hence we may certainly conclude, that our Blessed Saviour must be God; For

He that was "like to the Son of Man," said to St. John, "I am Alpha and Omega; the first and the last, which was, and is, and is to come."

Thirdly, Is this attribute peculiar to the true God?

Hence therefore we may easily argue, and infer also, that the Holy Spirit must be God, he being styled by our great Apostle "the eternal Spirit."

Secondly, For the reformation of our lives.

Will God endure for ever? This shews the safety and happiness of the soul that hath an interest in him. So Moses describes the happiness of his people, by saying, "the eternal God is thy refuge, and thy dwelling-place, and underneath are the everlasting arms; happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee? And

The reason hereof is plain; for hereby, by having an interest in this God, we are secure from evil, and are preserved in all dangers, as having

having “the everlasting arms” still ready to support us.

Our happiness moreover is great, from the enjoyment of the greatest and most lasting blessings, he being our “dwelling place,” in “whose presence there is fullness of joy,” who being an eternal God, must ever live to confer fresh and never-failing blessings on us.

To secure us of perfect happiness, there can be nothing further requisite, than to believe that he, in whom we have an interest, will be forever able to render our condition happy.

Of all this God’s faithful servants are assured from his Eternity; for, as his Being is eternal, so are all his perfections, his power and goodness, and the like; as he is ever able to defend us from evil, so his goodness will incline him to it, and will confer all favours upon us.

God’s love to his servants is an everlasting love; for, thus saith the Lord, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.”

“The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever,” is from everlasting to everlasting towards them that fear him, and to such as keep his Covenant, and remember his “commandments to do them.”

So that if our hearts do not wickedly depart from God; if they do not condemn us of insincerity

sincerity in our endeavours to yield obedience to his holy will, we may then rest secure of our interest in his favour, who is the ever-living God, and "steadfast for ever." But,

Secondly, Doth God endure for evermore? This may encourage us to place our trust and confidence in him.

It is He only who is eternal, in whom alone immortal souls can find any true ground of confidence, according to the exhortation of the Prophet: "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, " for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Whatever else we rest upon, or fly to for refuge, must be unable and insufficient to be unto us a sure ground of confidence, as being both of a frail nature, and fading; and therefore either apt to fail us, or to fall away itself. "Put not, therefore, your trust in Princes" (saith the Psalmist), "nor in any son of man, " in whom there is no help; for when his breath goeth forth, he shall return again to his earth, and then all his thoughts perish."

The Prophet Isaiah useth the same consideration to abate our confidence in mortal man: "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of," they being but lying refuges compared to the eternal God, whose power can never wax

faint, nor fail to do them good, who place their trust and confidence in him, "who is the "rock of ages."

"Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, "that the everlasting God, the Lord, the "Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth "not, neither is weary?" And having such a friend, whose power, whose love, and wisdom are as eternal as himself, how can the soul that hath an interest in him be disquieted with fears that any real evil shall befall him, any blessing be wanting to him?

The power, the goodness, the mercy, and all the other perfections of God, are as eternal and unchangeable as his Being. On this security the mind of man (after a life of virtue) may rely with full satisfaction; and they who love righteousness will be joyful therein: other security there is no where to be found, nor any thing that can afford sufficient comfort and support in the day of adversity.

A wise man therefore will, above all things, endeavour to secure to himself the favour of him who liveth for ever, and who alone can crown him with immortality and eternal life. "Hearken unto me" (saith the Prophet), "ye "that love righteousness, the people in whose "heart is my law, fear not the reproach of "men, neither be afraid of their reviling; for
"the

“the moth shall eat them up as a garment, and
“the worm shall eat them as wool; but my
“righteousness shall be for ever, and my sal-
“vation from generation to generation :” yea,
“the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to
“everlasting upon them that fear him, and his
“righteousness upon children’s children.”

This also is the encouragement which the Apostle gives the persecuted Jews, to continue steadfast in the faith, viz. that they “believe in
“that Jesus, who is the same yesterday, to-
“day, and for ever,” and therefore will be
ever ready to assist, and reward to the utmost,
his faithful servants : “Therefore we Chris-
“tians” (says he) “both labour and suffer re-
“proach, because we trust in the living God,
“who is the Saviour of all men, but especially
“of them that believe,”

But further, the doctrine before us is an ar-
gument why the Providence of God ought not
to be cavilled at, nor his promises doubted of,
even though there be no present appearance of
the performance of them, nor immediate way
of explaining the methods thereof.

Other Beings, who have command only of
the present time, if they cannot immediately
accomplish what they undertake, it is un-
certain but that some change in their own state,

or alteration in the nature and course of things, may prevent them from being able to accomplish it at all: But,

God, having in his hands the power of all time alike, can never be involved in any difficulty, hindered by any intervening accidents, perplexed by any change of things or circumstances, nor influenced by any length or periods of time; being in himself Allwise, Omnipotent, Self-sufficient, and Eternal, and therefore is at all times able and willing to perform his remotest promises, and to extricate the most perplexed appearances in the methods of his Providence.

Senseless, therefore, is the objection of those scoffers, whom the Apostle foretells “should come in the last days, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? For, since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation”—to which we have this true and plain answer :

“ Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, “ that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Again, the Eternity of God will encourage in us a true Christian obedience, as knowing that

that we serve him who can give us an everlasting reward.

As the promise of our future reward is founded in the goodness of God, and the greatness of it, in his power; so the duration of it is in his Eternity. Now,

What an exceeding encouragement is this to us, that we serve him, and suffer for him, who lives for ever, and who can and will make us happy for ever!

When we serve the great men of this world, though secure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; this discourages many, and makes men worship the rising sun: But,

He that serves God, serves the “everlasting King” (as the Apostle calls him) who ever lives to dispense rewards to all those who are faithful to him. But,

Fourthly, Is God Eternal in his duration and power, and in all his other attributes? then,

What can be more effectual, if but duly weighed and frequently reflected on, than is this consideration to affright the obstinate sinner, who rests secure in the strong holds of iniquity, from a continuance in his sinful courses.

Were we duly sensible of this, that an Almighty, just, and sin-revenging God, will live

for ever, to execute his wrath, and make known his power, in punishing the stubborn sinner, it would then be with us, as with those of Sion, of whom the Prophet Isaiah speaks thus : “ The sinners in Zion are afraid ; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites ; who among us (say they) can dwell with devouring fire, who can endure everlasting burnings ? ”

“ Who can dwell in that place of torment, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched ? ”

For, as the wrath of God is founded in his vindictive justice, and in the purity of his divine nature, which can never admit defiled souls into his presence, so the continuance of it depends on his Eternity.

The consideration of his omnipotence makes it very dreadful, but that of his Eternity renders it much more so, by making it perpetual.

When, therefore, any transitory pleasures, any temporal honours or advantages, tempt us to the commission of sin, which subjects us to the displeasure of the everlasting God, let us consider seriously, that it will certainly procure us an Eternal and an Almighty enemy ; and that it is the extremity of folly for “ the pleasures of sin, which are but for a short season,” to incense that justice, which will subject us to eternal torment. This consideration

consideration may have a double effect ; it will not only secure us from punishment, but may moreover, by the grace of God, with our own endeavours, be powerful to check the importunity of the temptation itself.

Our being actually convinced of this, as it will fill us with reverence towards his Majesty (whose throne is from generation to generation) ; so it will create horror at the guilt of sin, which opposing such an eternal Being, exposes to an eternal punishment from his presence, who for ever lives to inflict it ; with whom our past sins are always present, and can never be forgotten ; before whom our age is as nothing, and all the tempting enjoyments of the world as things that are not, and therefore not deserving an heart to be set upon them, because our portion for ever can only be God, who liveth and remaineth for ever.

This is another inference from the doctrine before us..

If God be eternal, then let him be our portion and our choice, and let all our actions be directed to the enjoyment of him, as knowing that in Him alone is everlasting happiness ; for as “ in his presence there is fullness of joy,” “ so at his right hand there are pleasures for “ evermore.”

If

If we neglect to make our friendship with him in this day of grace, we shall be sure to find him an eternal enemy..

Let us compare all other portions which we can enjoy, with that which the devout Psalmist mentions in these words : “ The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance,” and we shall easily discern the vast advantage, and consequently the wisdom of his choice.

“ Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee;” “ for when my strength and my heart faileth me, then is God the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

But further, the Eternity of God is a prelude and an assurance of our own : for we are assured that after the resurrection, at the consummation of all things, “ we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is;” therefore let us provide for eternity.

What wisdom is it to neglect the welfare of our ever-precious, never-dying souls, to make provision for that body, which (after all our care) must ere long return to that earth from whence it came ?

Our

Our souls are immaterial beings, what correspondence therefore can there be between them and material things? They are of a spiritual nature, what advantage therefore can they reap from things earthly? it is impossible: not even “God and mammon” are or can be more divided than are these things before us.

It is an immortal soul that God hath given us, whereas all worldly things are perishing; we ought by no means, therefore, to speak comfort to ourselves in them, even though we should have “goods laid up for many years;” for, what is an estate only for years, to a soul that will endure to all eternity! When these, our many years, are past and gone, if we have purchased nothing more lasting to our souls, will they not hereafter suffer an eternal famine?

Having then eternal souls, let us endeavour that we may ever have an interest in this eternal God; for, to eternity they must endure: And, what can more concern us, than that it should be an happy, and not a miserable eternity.

A portion in this life is too frequently the sad lot of them who have no interest in the life to come, and so must hereafter be for ever miserable: but a portion in that God who lives for ever, is happiness for ever.

That

That which crowns the joys of Heaven, is the consideration that this most happy state will be eternal, and have no end, but that after the period of many ages, there still remains a long eternity to succeed, depending upon the existence of that God, who ever lives to confer it.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Of the Paternity of God, &c.

EPHES. iv. 6. “*One God, and Father of All.*”

THE Unity of the Divine Nature hath been already considered*; my intention, therefore, is to enforce the doctrine here further confirmed to us; the endearing attribute of God’s Paternity over us—“*One God, and Father of all.*”

In speaking hereto, I shall

First, see how and in what instances his fatherly care over us is expressed towards us, and the different notions in which it is to be explained; and then,

Secondly, what inferences and improvements can be made therefrom.

First, Amongst the titles and characters given to the Almighty, is that of Universal Father, which hath been ascribed to him, not only

* Sermon the Second.

only by the writers of the Old and New Testament, but by the general and ancient consent of all civilized nations.

Christianity, indeed, hath enabled us to see more distinctly than either the Gentiles or the Jews, the several accounts on which God is our Father.

This title, in many respects, truly and properly belongs to him: We are his children, as we are his creatures, made, preserved, and maintained by him, as we are intellectual creatures, formed in his image;

As by the practice of virtue and goodness we still more resemble him, and enjoy his particular favour; as we are Christians adopted into his heavenly family, renewed by his assistance, and acknowledged as brethren by his only begotten son, who partook of a peculiar sonship from him; and, as we are designed to inherit eternal life:

By right of creation we are peculiarly his, which is a kind of generation:

By right of conservation, which is a paternal act, and on which account Job reckoned himself to be a Father to the poor and fatherless. Again,

God is our Father by way of education and governance, extended towards all men, and more peculiarly evidenced towards good men;

he

he governs and educates all men as their Father, by wholesome instructions of his word and providence, by necessary and seasonable corrections; by compassionating the miserable and presiding over all in dignity and age, with goodness and affection, being Father, as he is Prince of the Universe, and as the prime Original of our stock, being before and above all things, styled "the Ancient of Days," and, "by whom all things are," and, therefore, eminently the "Father of All."

Among all these proper senses wherein the Almighty is truly styled Father, I shall only here consider the two most eminent of them, viz. That of our receiving our creation and spiritual adoption from him, on which accounts we are peculiarly his "as sons of a very and true Father." And,

First, God is the Father, or Author of all things, by originally creating and giving them being. In this sense the wisest of the ancient Philosophers among the Heathens styled God "the Father of the Universe."

And the Scriptures sometimes use expressions of the same nature. Thus, when St. Paul had declared, that "to us there is but one God," he immediately in the very next words gives a definition who that one God is, by adding, "The Father, of whom are all things," i. e.

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from whom all things derive their existence, and are brought into being by his will and power.

The like manner of speaking we find again in my text, “One God, and Father of All, “ who is above all, and through all, and in “all.”

“Father of All,” i. e. Author and Creator of all things.

So the word is used in the Creed, when we declare that “we believe in God the Father Almighty,” or “the Almighty Father, Maker “of Heaven and Earth.”

This is the utmost latitude of signification to which the word can possibly be extended; it reaching in this sense to things both rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, making God truly and properly, in the fullest and most literal sense, “the Father of the Universe.”

But more commonly the word is used in Scripture in a sense more restrained, and with regard only to rational and intelligent beings, God being peculiarly styled Father, with respect to those to whom he hath given life and understanding; but Creator or Maker only, with respect to inanimate things, to whom he hath communicated only simple being.

Thus he is styled by the Apostle, “the “Father of Spirits,” and “the Father, of “whom

“ whom the whole family in Heaven and earth
“ is named.”

Father and family are relative terms; and it is a noble idea which this text gives us of God, representing the whole universe as the House of God, framed and preserved by his wisdom and power; and all orders of intelligent beings, as the family of God, under the government of his wisdom, and justice, and goodness, in their several and respective stations.

In this sense Angels are styled the Sons of God: “ The morning stars sang together, “ and all the Sons of God shouted for joy;” i. e. the Angels rejoiced, and praised God at the time of the creation of the visible world.

And the same assembly, who are styled the Host of Heaven, are, in another place, equally so termed: “ I saw the Lord (saith the Prophet Micah) sitting on his throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left;” these also are in another description of the like vision called “ the Sons of God.”

Again, “ There was a day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.” And, Nebuchadnezzar “ saw four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, “ and the form of the fourth (says he) was like the Son of God;” or, like a Son of God,

i. e. like an Angel, as the same person is stiled in the 28th verse of the same chapter.

Upon the same account, viz. upon the account of having received life from the hands of God, "the life of an intelligent and rational Being," our first Father, Adam, is called "the Son of God," "which was the Son of Adam, which was the Son of God."

And all mankind, considered as creatures endued with reason and understanding in opposition to idols, which have neither sense nor understanding, nor life, are said to be the offspring of God; "in him we live, and move, and have our being (as certain also of your own poets have said); for we also are his offspring." And further in this text, "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God."

This therefore is the first and original sense wherein God is, in Scripture, stiled our Father.

It signifies our deriving from him our being, and our life; all things are his creatures, but intelligent beings only are his Sons.

Thus far is God our Father by nature. But Secondly, There is still a higher and more peculiar sense, wherein the Scripture represents God as being our Father, spiritually, by religion and grace.

Concerning

Concerning which St. Paul speaks thus:

"Ye have received the spirit of adoption,
"whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

The true explication of which notion may, I think, be rightly set forth in the following manner:

As God is in general the Father of all intelligent beings; and rational, so is he in a more peculiar and exalted manner the Father of him who, in Scripture, is styled "the only begotten Son," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" "the image of the invisible God, and the first begotten of every creature."

By the interposition of this divine person (the only begotten Son), "it pleased the Father (saith St. Paul) to reconcile all things to himself." "By him, saith he, to reconcile all things, whether they be things in earth, or things in Heaven."

The meaning is, the whole world of rational creatures being considered as the family of God (according to that text before cited, which declares, that "of him the whole family in Heaven and earth is named"), the government of this house of God is represented by the Apostle as administered by the only begotten Son, "whom the Father hath given to be the head over all things, that he might

“gather together in one, all things in Christ,
“both which are in Heaven, and which are
“in earth, even in Him.”

By sin men reject themselves, and (in the divine justice) are rejected out of this household of God, and “are no more worthy to be called Sons.”

But by true repentance and amendment of life through faith, made available through the intercession of Christ, our great High Priest, “they, who were sometimes alienated, and “enemies in their minds by wicked works, are “again reconciled, and through him have access again, by one spirit unto the Father; “and are no more strangers and foreigners, “but fellow citizens with the Saints, and of “the household of God.”

This restoring of sinners by repentance and reformation of life, through the mediation of Christ, to the favour of God, is elegantly stiled by St. Paul, “God, our Father’s adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.”

The effect of which reconciliation to those who, by the practice of virtue and righteousness, continue to live worthy of their most holy calling, is, that Christ is not “ashamed to call them Brethren,” and that God himself vouchsafes them the denomination of Sons.

“Behold

“ Behold what manner of love the Father
“ hath bestowed on us, that we should be
“ called the Sons of God,” and that accord-
ingly “ we have access with confidence to
“ the Throne of Grace, as to a merciful and
“ reconciled Father.” “ Ye have received the
“ adoption of Sons ; and because ye are Sons,
“ God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son
“ into your hearts, crying Abba, Father ; ”
“ wherefore thou art no more a servant, but
“ a Son ; and if a Son, then an Heir of God,
“ through Christ ; yea, Heirs of God, and
“ joint Heirs with Christ.”

In consequence of this state of reconcilia-
tion, our Saviour, in all his discourses, con-
stantly represents God as having the tender
care and affection of a Father towards us : He
teaches us to acknowledge him, and look up
to him as our Father, upon the account of his
continual providence in preserving us ; his
love, in revealing himself to us by his Son ;
his goodness, in being ready to assist us by his
spirit ; his mercy, in forgiving our offences ;
his authority, mixed with the greatest patience,
in correcting us, not as earthly parents, “ af-
ter their own pleasure, but for our profit,
“ to the intent that, in the end, we might be
“ partakers of our hope.” And,

To

To encourage us to pray to him, he lays before us that moving and most pathetic argument recorded in the Gospel, “ If ye, being “ evil, know how to give good gifts unto your “ children, how much more shall your hea-“ venly Father, your Father which is in Hea-“ ven, give good things to them that ask “ him? ”

Upon both these considerations, as well as that of his benignity towards us, viz. on account of our natural and spiritual sonship, and the many favours which he confers upon us, it is, that we are taught, in that divine form of prayer given us by our blessed Lord and Saviour, to address God himself, under that endearing appellation of “ Our Father, which “ art in Heaven,”

And by our Mother, the Church, frequently the same, viz. “ Almighty and most merciful “ Father —.”

“ We humbly beseech thee, O Father—.”

“ Almighty God, Father of all mercies;” and the like.

In the writings indeed of some authors, God seems at times to be represented to us under a different character, as “ an hard master,” “ expecting to reap where he has not sown, “ and to gather where he has not strawed.”

But:

But such representations are consequences only of men's private opinions, and not taught, but reprobated in Scripture.

For, God is love, and kindness, and benignity, and consequently loves and does good to all his creatures, and "his tender mercies" "are over all his works."

Only against wilful wickedness is he indeed irreconcileably severe; and unrighteousness is his abomination.

Having thus seen how and in what instances God's fatherly care is expressed towards us, and the different notions in which it is to be explained, I am,

Secondly, To draw a few inferences from the same.

And here, the consideration of this relation of God to us tends to inform and admonish us concerning many necessary duties resulting thence, and to enforce upon us the practice of them.

The returns which are due from us, as from children to our heavenly Father, are abundant honour, absolute obedience and submission, cheerful compliance, imitation, trust and confidence, resignation and contentment, and a love of our fellow creatures.

First, in general it may, and should put us in mind of the reverence and honour due to him

him from us, as from children to their father, and that on the most obliging account. “ A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if I then, fays God himself by his Prophet Malachi, “ be a Father, where is my honour?”

But further, the word Father implies in it dominion and authority, claiming obedience and subjection from the children.

From the extensive nature of paternal right among men, we may judge of the authority which God hath over us, as he is our Father, and of the obedience which, as children, we must yield to him.

Children ought to be entirely guided by their parents whilst they are young, and incapable of judging and acting for themselves.

When they grow up to manhood, tho’ love and honour remain even then indispensable duties, yet the paternal authority is not so great as it was. But

With relation to God, we are ever young, and in a state of minority, and therefore at all times the disposition of children is required of us toward God.

As God is our Father, a willing compliance, and a cheerful obedience are due to him from us.

Fatherly dominion, as it is the most ancient and natural, so it is certainly the most gentle

of

of all governments, and parents are usually apt to err on the side of indulgence, rather than of severity.

God is a Father to us, in every sense of the word, bestowing upon us more than we could hope or expect, forgiving us our offences, ruling us with lenity, making allowances for human infirmities, temptations, surprises, mistakes, and errors, yea, every thing that can claim compassion. Thus the Scriptures speak of him, and, condescending to our apprehensions, clothe him with paternal kindness, or weakness, which shall we call it?

They represent him loath to correct, and much distressed when he is compelled to it; and then, soon relenting, and appeased, and disarmed, by the first tokens of a sincere repentance. Again,

The consideration that God is our Father, should lead us to imitate and resemble him.

It should raise in us a just regard for and due valuation of ourselves, and excite in us an innocent and an honest pride; it should inspire noble thoughts, and produce in us generous inclinations, withdraw us from mean, base, and unworthy designs and actions, and excite us to undertakings suitable to the dignity of our nature, and the nobility of our descent; it should cause that we do nothing ignoble,
but

but every thing worthy of such an eminent and high relation, and as shall answer the credit of such our extraction.

The relation of Father and Son supposes some likeness; and the Son, who values and respects his Father, will be ashamed to degenerate, but will make it his endeavour equally to inherit his virtues, as his name and fortune, and to be the fair transcript of the perfect original: “If ye were Abraham’s children,” says our Lord to the Jews, “ye would do the works of Abraham.”

So, “if we be the sons of God, we must, as St. Paul exhorts, imitate God, as dear children.”

The Scriptures frequently remind us of this duty, both in general, and also in particulars.

God is holy and pure, so ought we to be. “As he who hath called us is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, that ye may be the sons of God.”

God is good; in this we should resemble him: “Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect.”

God is bountiful, gracious, merciful, and long suffering; thence also should we learn to be kind to all, even to our enemies, “that we may be the children of our Father, who is in Heaven.”

Yea,

Yea, our own reason will tell us, that long depravity of heart and habitual wickedness must destroy (in a great measure) this relation between God and us.

If sensual objects engross all our thoughts and time, if our "better part" be sunk in brutish pleasures, how can we be the children of him who is pure and spiritual? If we be fierce and contentious, malicious and unrelenting, cruel and uncharitable, in what sense can we belong to him, who is essential love, and over-flowing benevolence?

Can he acknowledge us for his, when sin hath defaced the fair image, and not one token remains by which he can know us?

Let us therefore for ever guard against sin, which is of so dire a consequence as to exclude us from any relationship to God, and from all the beneficial effects flowing therefrom, and aim at all and every virtue, as being that alone which can manifest our spiritual sonship and adoption, and render us "meet to be partners of the inheritance of God's sons in light." But further,

The consideration that God is our Father, teaches us that it is our duty to place our trust in God, and confidence in prayer towards him. We call this a duty, and so it is; yet ought it rather to be considered as our privilege,

lege, and as an exceeding great favour, to be permitted to cast all our burthen and care upon God, to rely on his providence, and to be solicitous about nothing that concerns our sustenance.

Children, especially such as have wealthy and kind parents, live altogether at ease, and free from every care concerning their maintenance, void of all doubt, and void of all distrust. And,

Such ought to be the state of our minds, since we have a Father so good and great, as (notwithstanding large as his family is) to be able to “open his hand, and fill all things “living with plenteousness.”

“What man is there, who, if his son ask
“him bread, will give him a stone? or, if he ask
“a fish, will, for a fish, give him a serpent?”
“If we then, who are evil, know how to give
“good gifts to our children, how much more
“shall our heavenly Father give good things
“to them that ask him?”

Thus our Saviour (with a convincing force of argument) excites us to draw near to our Father, not with the abject fear and extorted submission of slaves, nor with the diffident shyness of strangers; nor, with the doubts and suspicions of half reconciled enemies, but with a true

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true filial temper, with respectful love, and a modest and humble confidence.

Further, to this hope and reliance is to be added contentment and resignation; contentment in a low or inconvenient, and resignation, in a suffering state.

To our Father and Master it belongs of right to order his own family according to his own discretion, to assign a proper station, and to allot a proper portion severally to each; and, much better it is for us that he should exercise this authority, than that we should serve ourselves, since the worst of God's disposings (if any thing in the divine œconomy can be so termed) is better than the best of man's orderings. But,

Lastly, If God be the Father of all beings, then are they all in some sort related to us, and so may claim from us a due affection and regard, according to their respective natures, dispositions, capacities, behaviour, and deserts.

As we are all members of one great family, we are therefore obliged to universal benevolence.

Even the very least of God's creatures is not to be oppressed, nor be misused by us, since even that, with us, is the work of God's hands, the subject of his care, and the object of his providence.

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We are taught by our Saviour when we pray, to say "our" not my "Father," to remind us of our brethren as well as of God, who is our Father. And

"He who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God his Father, whom he hath not seen?"

Respectful thoughts are due from us to the holy Angels, who are sent forth to minister to us, though unseen, and to do us good offices.

A grateful remembrance is due to those excellent persons departed hence, whose examples excite to emulation, and with whom we hope to converse hereafter.

Benevolence is due to all mankind, "especially to those who are of the household of Faith," in conformity to the example of our heavenly Father, "who is good, and doth good, especially to those who are faithful and obedient to him."

In a word, this should cherish our faith, raise our hope, and quicken our devotions, so as to address ourselves to him with dispositions of heart becoming children, who have nowhere such a father, as "our Father which is in Heaven;" making him acquainted with all our wants, coming to him for advice in all our straits, trusting him with all our concerns, readily obeying all his commands, being pleased and

and contented with all and any of his allotments, bearing his chastisements with patience, receiving his encouragements with thankfulness, rendering him the utmost of our love, behaving ourselves orderly and “kindly towards all his children,” as fellow creatures, and brethren with us, in respect to him, who is our common Father, and, in all his imitable perfections striving to resemble him, “being followers or imitators of God, as dear children.”

Without such filial effects as these, and such like, on our lives, vain will be our faith in this endearing attribute of God, our Father, nay worse, if we treat him as our enemy, and shew ourselves undutiful, and rebellious to him.

Always remembering then the nobleness of our extraction, and our exalted descent, may we (as sons of the Most High) “walk worthy the vocation wherewith we are called;” and having God for our Father, may we “render” him every duty consequent thereon, that he may not be ashamed of us when he shall “come in his glory, with all his holy Angels with him,” to give crowns of glory to all them that have acted consistent to their stations, and as sons of the Most High God, their relation.

SERMON VII.

GOD the first Cause, and last End of
all Things.

Rom. xi. 36. “*Of Him, and through Him,
and to Him, are all Things; to whom be Glory
for ever.*”

TH E Apostle, having considered God’s wonderful proceedings towards the Jews and Gentiles, to shew that there is no injustice in them, (how unaccountable soever they may seem to us) proves that no one hath merited any thing at God’s hands, nor is it possible, by any services we can do, to lay any obligation upon him; for every thing that we have, is his free gift unto us: and is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own?

Who hath first given to God?—If any one can truly say that he hath given any thing to Him, it shall be recompensed him again:

But

But this is altogether impossible, for we are, at best, but receivers, and consequently debtors unto him ; for, “ of Him, and through Him, “ and to Him, are all things ; to whom be “ be glory for ever.”

That God is the first cause, and efficient, and the ultimate end of all things, is a proposition which was universally acknowledged and professed by the holy men of old, tho' modern Scepticks, whose folly is their wisdom, have made it a matter of dispute ; who, glorying in their atheistical tenets, cavil at the prime fundamental articles of religion, in hopes, at one stroke, to fell the whole superstructure :

For, To what purpose (say they) is any one act of religion performed, if there be not a God at the helm, to guide and conduct affairs ? If there be not a God who sees the conduct of his servants, in order to reward them accordingly ?

This they endeavour to make good ; but to their confusion be it known, “ that unto us “ there is one God,* who is the Father of all ; † “ by whom are all things, and we by Him.”

So that from these, and the words before us, we cannot understand less, than that God is the efficient cause of all things, and, of course, the final : also, to whom all things are to be referred ; for, “ of Him, and through Him, and

* Sermon the second.

† Sermon the sixth.

“ of

"to Him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever."

Not only the dispensation of grace, but of good things ; not only in the work of redemption, but of creation also is God the fountain and original, from whence every good thing proceeds, and the last end to which every thing is to be referred.

In speaking further to these words, I shall observe the following order, and shall shew,

First, The true meaning and import of them :

Secondly, Confirm the doctrine contained in them ; and then,

Lastly, See what uses and improvements can be made therefrom.

First, Of the true meaning and import of them.

These words, as they suggest to us that God is the first cause of all things, so do they plainly imply, that there was no cause of Him, that he derived not his being from another, or depends upon him ; for the Creator must be both before and above the creature, therefore must be pre-existent before all things ; and was always and eternally of Himself. Thus much is implied from the necessary order of the words before us ; and then,

In direct terms we infer from them, that there never was any efficient cause of God, but that.

that as He was always of Himself, so He is the cause of all things besides Himself, the fountain and Original of all created beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend : or, to use the expression of St. John, " By Him all things were made, and without " Him was not any thing made that was made."

So that when we attribute to God, that he is the First, we mean, that there was nothing before Him, and that He was before all things, and that all things are by Him.

But further; not only " Of Him," but also " To Him are all things."

" All things tend to their original ;" God being the Creator of all things, all things, of course, must have recourse unto Him ; which they all, some way or other, do, to the illustration of his glory, and the manifestation of his perfections, the end for which they were made.

The words thus explained naturally lead me (according to the order proposed) to confirm the doctrine contained in them, which I shall do under the two-fold advantage of natural light and divine revelation.

First, By natural light, the notion of God contains in it all possible perfection.

Now the utmost perfection we can imagine is, for a Being to be wholly independent, and the

the author of all blessings, however dispersed, which he can only be, by being alway of itself, and before all things, and by being the cause and original of them, from whom they are all derived, and on whom they continually depend.

This notion and ingredient of the divine Being struck so forcibly upon the heathen world, even by the light of nature, that it is almost one of the first principles in their theology.

So that the being of all things is to be attributed to God; that all things are by him is not only reasonable, now it is revealed, and authentically discovered, but is what was also discovered by the natural light of the Heathens themselves.

Hence it was that they gave to God the titles of “the first Being, the first cause, and the “first mover of all things.”

Hence it was that they called God “the “Author and Parent of all things;” “the “maker and architect of the world, and of all “creatures;” “the fountain and original of “all things.”

But further, God (from the natural light of mankind) being thus proved to be the author of all things, is, from thence also, plainly proved

proved to be the end, and ultimate object, to which all things are to be referred.

Every wise agent acts upon design, and to some end ; even in the creature we see the perfect traces of the first original, and we are sufficiently provident not to lay out our labour for nothing. If therefore (in the imperfect pattern) these things are so truly discernable, in how much greater amplitude, suppose ye, must it shine in that “fullness of “wisdom,” “which made all things for him-“self?”

The aim and design then for which God made all things was (some way or other) for the illustration of his glory, and the manifestation of his perfections. This is the highest end that we can imagine, to which all the effects of the divine power, and goodness, and wisdom, do refer.

This also was so evident to the very Heathens by the light of nature, that they equally acknowledged it with the former principle.

For, they thought nothing could be a greater contradiction than to acknowledge “God “to be the author and giver of every good and “perfect gift,” and yet to deny him the returns due.

Hence therefore it was that from calling him the first, they reasoned that he was also the last,

last, and ultimate end of all things, and that all things moved towards God, as things to their centre, or as an uplifted stone again impends to its mother earth : “because (say they) it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their original, and to return to the great Creator of all things.” Yea,

When speaking of Nature (which with them signifies God) they have these words, which are so very like those of the Apostle, that they may seem to be taken from them : “ Of thee, and to thee, are all things.”

These are the arguments which the Heathens (without the assistance of a divine revelation) gathered, in proof of the doctrine before us ; and no marvel, that either to the first proposition they were so exact, or to the second so particular. For,

As to the first, they had the beauty of the universe to convince them herein ; as to the latter, innumerable instances of nature to confirm it unto them, as well as the ingenuity of their own minds.

Every stream spontaneously ran to its first great depth, and every thing on earth dropped down to that level out of which it first was raised ; and, these maxims of theirs (if we had not a divine revelation further to confirm it unto us) we could by no means disapprove.

For,

For, what folly is it to impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things, to chance? Those things which bear the proper effects of counsel, and the plain and evident impressions of wisdom upon them?

What pitiful shifts are the Atheists put to to make good their assertions in the denial of God, and the first formation of all things! or, rather indeed, which more thoroughly expose them!

Is it not much more reasonable to say that the wisdom of God made them, and that "all these things are by him," than to attribute them to a happy fortuitous concourse of atoms, thus conveniently connected by chance?

But further, besides the light of nature, we have also the testimony of Holy Writ to confirm us herein.

Hither belong all those places, where he declares himself to be "the first and the last."

"Before me there was no God, neither after me shall there be any." "I am the first, I also am the last." "My hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread the Heavens;" which is as much as to say, that he made the world, and was the first cause all things. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (saith

“the Lord) which is, and which was, and
“which is to come.”

But more expressly, “to us there is but one
“God, the Father, of whom are all things,
“and we by him.” “God made the world,
“and all things therein”. “He giveth to all
“life, and breath, and all things.” “By him
“we live, and move, and have our being.”
“For of him, and through him, and to him,
“are all things.” Again,

Hither also we may refer those texts which
attribute the same to the second person in the
adorable Trinity, as being the eternal “wis-
“dom and word of God,” whereby all things
were made.

“All things were made by him, and with-
“out him was not any thing made that was
“made.” “God created all things by Jesus
“Christ.” “By him were all things created
“that are in the Heavens above, or in the
“earth beneath, visible or invisible, whether
“they be thrones, or dominions, principali-
ties, or powers; all things were created by
“him, and for him.”

I shall say no more in proof of this doctrine,
that “all things are by God, and for him,”
but shall hasten (by way of application hereto),

Thirdly, To enforce the duty which the
goodness of God (manifested in the creation of

us,

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us, and so many things around us) requires from us. "To him be glory for ever."

If God be the first cause of all things, and the producer of them, calling them forth into existence, and hath ever since preserved, and doth govern and dispose of all their concerns, and orders every thing that befalls them, Then

Hence let us learn, with humility and thankfulness, to own and acknowledge, to admire and bless God, the author and original of our beings, and as the spring and fountain of all the blessings and good things which we enjoy.

"Praise (saith the Psalmist) is comely for
"the upright, and it becometh well the just to
"be thankful." It is the most honourable of all religious duties, being the same service which is paid by the blessed Saints and Angels in Heaven, and, as God himself declares, is also most acceptable to him : "Who offereth me
"praise, he honoureth me."

Did we but consider what these words import, that "God is the first cause of all things," we should see exceeding great reason to acknowledge, to adore, and praise him, and that with the greatest humility, and most profound reverence; because we have not given him any thing, but have received all from him.

He is the cause of all things, who did freely and of his own good will and pleasure commu-

nicate beings to us, without any restraint or necessity, but what his own goodness laid upon him : “ Thou art worthy, therefore, O Lord, “ to receive glory and honour, and power, for “ thou hast created all things, and for thy “ pleasure they are, and were created.”

We could not (before we were) deserve any thing from him, or move him by any argument, or importune him by any intreaties, to make us ; but he freely gave us our being, and ever since we depend upon him, and by him have been preserved, and cannot subsist one moment without the continued influence of the same power and goodness which first called us out of nothing.

He is the author of all the good, and the fountain of all those blessings which for the present we enjoy, or for the future hope for.

Let us therefore render him back the glory due, the tribute of praise and thanksgiving ; the tribute of living to his glory, who made us out of nothing, for his own honour and our benefit.

When he made us at first, he designed us for happiness ; and when “ we by transgression “ fell,” when by our sin and wilful disobedience we forfeited that happiness, which he designed us for, he sent no less a person than his only begotten Son into the world for our recovery,

recovery, and gave his life a ransom for our souls : He hath not only admitted us into a new covenant, wherein he hath promised pardon and eternal life to us, upon the few and easy conditions only of faith and repentance (which is amendment and obedience), but hath also purchased these blessings for us, by the most endearing price, even the blood of his own Son, and hath saved us in such a manner as may justly astonish us. “ O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men ; that they would shew forth his praise with thanksgiving, and tell out his works with gladness.” Upon these considerations it is that we should awaken ourselves to the praise of God, and “ speak well of him in all places of his dominion,” and with the holy Psalmist call up our spirits, and summon all the faculties and powers of our souls to assist us in this work.

“ Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thine infirmities; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with tender mercies and loving kindness.”

" It is he that satisfieth our souls with good things, and hath promised eternal life and happiness to us, and will (in the end) confer and bestow it upon us; therefore our souls, and all that is within us, should bless his holy name."

This is all the return we can make him for the being which he hath given us, for the daily preservation of it, and for the blessings and favours he is continually heaping upon us; 'tis so just a tribute, that there can be no greater provocation than to withhold it from him.

St. Paul ascribes the blindness and ignorance of the Heathen world to this cause, " that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, wherefore God gave them up" to all that folly and lewdness, of which the Apostle (in the following verses of that chapter) gives a full and particular account.

The Jews also, who were God's own peculiar people, and so highly favoured by him, that he had not dealt so with any other nation, were very often as severely punished, and at last delivered over to destruction for their unthankfulness.

Let the goodness of God therefore be alway in our thoughts, when we reflect upon the instances

stances of his love towards us ; how he created, and doth still preserve us ; how he redeemed us from sin and misery, and calls us to repentance, and is ready to forgive us whenever we return to him ; how he supplies us with his grace, to enable us to do our duty, and has promised eternal happiness as the reward of our obedience.

For these things, “not unto us, O Lord, “not unto us, but unto thy name give we the “praise.” For, “thou art worthy, O Lord, “to receive glory and honour, and power, for “thou hast created all things, and for thy “pleasure they are and were created.”

But further, not only praise and thanksgiving, but ardent love also hereby becomes our duty towards him.

It is our Saviour’s argument, “He to whom “little is given, loveth little : but, to whom-“soever much is imparted, the same loveth “much.” If we consider the blessings of God towards us, “in the creation and preservation, “but more especially in the redemption of “mankind by Jesus Christ, for the means of “grace, and hopes of glory,” we shall surely think that the greatest expressions of our love towards him are little enough for his favours towards us. Now,

What

What it is to love God, God himself hath expressly declared unto us: "He that loveth me, keepeth my commandments;" yea, "in this is our love to God perfected;" in that we do whatsoever he saith unto us: "He therefore that saith I love God, and yet keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

As therefore we "shew forth the voice of his praise in thanksgiving," so let us also manifest the sincerity of our love towards him, in all dutiful obedience, for his favours unto us.

But further, if God be the first cause of all things, and by his providence orders and disposes all our concerns, this should teach us with patience and resignation to submit to all events, and to whatever afflictions may befall us, as being all of them ordered by his wise disposal for our good.

There are many excellent considerations besides this, whereby to make us submit duly to whatever befalls us; but all these we are but too apt to overlook, and in our hearts regard only the immediate agents, which are but the second causes of the things before us; not considering that all their motions are directly subordinate to the first, and that all the actions of God's creatures are under his wise controul; so

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so that nothing can happen to us without the design, or at least the permission of God.

This one consideration, therefore, is sufficient of itself to silence every murmur and discontent that may arise in our breasts, against any of the dispensations of providence towards us.

And, accordingly, we find that holy men, in Scripture, made excellent use hereof, to argue themselves into patience and resignation, with content, in every condition.

So Eli, “ It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”

So Job, who did not consider the immediate occasions of all his afflictions to him, but looks up to God, the great governor and disposer of all these events: “ the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

So our blessed Saviour, when he was ready to suffer, did not consider the malice of his enemies, which was the immediate cause of his death, but looks up to an higher end, even to “ God, who ruleth over all.”

“ The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

He that looks upon all things as coming from second causes, and in his heart regards not the first, “ the good and wise governor,”

will

will be apt to take offence at every cross and unwelcome accident that befalls him.

When we look upon evils as coming only from Men “of like passions with ourselves,” we are apt to be impatient, and to say, “who ‘made thee a dispenser of these things to us?’”

We should therefore look upon all things as under the government and disposal of the first cause, and the circumstances of every condition, as allotted to us by the wise providence of our Maker.

This consideration, that it is his hand, and that he hath done it, would still and allay all the murmurings of our hearts, whenever they attempt to rebel against him.

If we would but represent God as present to all actions, and governing and disposing all events, this would silence and appease our spirits when they are ready to riot and mutiny against any of God’s dispensations.

These are some of the uses which we are to make from the consideration of God’s being the first cause of all things: But,

Lastly, If God be the last end also, then let us so regard him as to refer all our actions to his glory; this is that which is due unto him; for, as he is the first cause, therefore doth he most reasonably require it from us. And

Herein

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Herein likewise the Scriptures are express, frequently and strongly reminding us of this end, calling upon us to propose it to ourselves as our ultimate design; “ whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God ;” yea, we are to “ glorify him in our souls, and in our bodies, which are his.” He is the author of all the faculties and powers that we have, and therefore we should render him back the glory due, by using them all to his honour and service.

We do all by Him, and therefore should do all to Him ; for “ of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.” “ To whom, therefore, (through Jesus Christ) be glory for ever.” Amen.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

Of the Dominion of God, &c.

ROM. ix. 5. "Who is over All?"

THESE words, as being immediately spoken of the person of Christ, the Son of God, are and must be equally applicable to God, "of whom" (as to his divine nature) "Christ came, who is over all; God, blessed for ever."

We all live under the benign government, and are all subject to the dominion of the God of Heaven.

The dominion of God, as it is exercised by his providential dispensations, is the government of a Being who is infinitely wise, and just, and good, is the most comfortable thing we can propose to our conceptions.

Though they who represent it as the dominion of an Almighty arbitrary Being, who, by mere

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mere will, can make that good or evil, which, (in the common sentiments of mankind) is otherwise, and as one who hath a right to doom all mankind to inevitable and eternal misery, make it the most dreadful thing we can possibly imagine.

It may therefore conduce to many good purposes to state this attribute in its proper light, that we may have such apprehensions of it as may render it just ground of comfort and satisfaction, and not of dread and horror to us; and this I shall do by laying before you,

First, the true and proper import of the doctrine before us, according to the best divines. And then,

Secondly, confirm it, in its absolute acceptance, from the best authorities.

Concluding with such inferences as shall reasonably flow from the same: And,

First, The government of God is (as to power) absolute and uncontrollable; no power from any where derived, or however combined, being able to hinder him, who being Almighty,
“ doth according to his will, in the armies of
“ Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the
“ earth.” “ My counsel (saith God) shall
“ stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

But then it is the pleasure of that God, who is infinite in all perfections, and conse-

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quently

quently in wisdom and justice, in holiness, truth, and goodness, as well as in power and omnipotence.

These being all immediate emanations from the same simple and invariable essence, he cannot exert any of them so as to thwart and contradict each other.

He therefore cannot exercise any such sovereignity over his creatures, whilst they continue capable of his grace and goodness, as is repugnant thereto, and to his mercy and compassion to the souls that he hath made.

True and excellent are those words of the book of wisdom, "Thou hast mercy on all, " for thou canst do all things, and winkest at "the sins of men, because they should amend; " for thou lovest all the things that are, and "abhorrest nothing that thou hast made; for, "never wouldst thou have made any thing, if "thou hadst hated it: But thou sparest all, "for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of "souls."

This we may even learn from our earthly governors, for though they may have ability sufficient to protect us, and great wisdom to discern what is for the good of their subjects, Yet, if they be deficient in justice, goodness, or compassion for them, their power and wisdom may be exercised in the worst of tyrannies,

as

as only rendering them able to do mischief according to the best of their skill. But,

None of these things are in God; for, he is regulated according to the fullness of his nature, invariably, and in no way contradicts himself.

As to the sovereignty and dominion of God, therefore,

We negatively say that it doth not consist in a right to gratify and delight himself in the extreme misery and punishment of innocent and undeserving creatures; for a just God can never challenge more than an equal right; and,

Because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless jealousies, and unworthy thoughts of God, he hath therefore given us his oath to assure us of the contrary: "As I live (saith the Lord) I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live."

Yea, so far is he from taking pleasure in misery and destruction, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be rather pleased if they would, by repentance, avert his justice.

God, who is good and gracious to all, cannot be glorified, or pleased in doing hurt to any, where justice doth not require it.

Nothing is further from infinite goodness than to rejoice in evil.

Q 2

Again,

Again, the sovereignty of God doth not consist in imposing laws upon his creatures which are either impossible to be understood or observed by them.

For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict also the nature of a reasonable creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any power to impossibilities.

Again, the dominion of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to necessitate them to sin, and then punish them for it; for,

As this would be contrary to the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God, so likewise would it be to the nature of a reasonable creature who cannot be guilty or deserve punishment for what he cannot help; and also to the nature of virtue and vice, which cannot consist with force and constraint; and therefore,

Affirmatively we say, that God, by virtue of his absolute dominion, hath an unquestionable right to dispose of all our temporal concerns, and even our life itself according to his will, because, in so doing, he only disposeth of that which he himself had only given during pleasure.

He

He also hath a right, for the same reason, to command us to regulate our desires in the pursuit of earthly things, and moderate our appetites in the use of them ; to be liberal in our distribution, according to the rules of charity prescribed by his wisdom, and even to deny ourselves in the enjoyment of them, and freely to part with them, when he requires it ; for, what he freely gives, he may give with what restrictions, to what ends and uses, and for what time, in his wisdom, he shall think meet.

In a word, the sovereignty and dominion of God consists in a right to dispose of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict his essential perfections, nor our natural conditions.

As to the dispensations of grace allotted to men in this life, and of rewards and punishments in the other, the arbitrariness of his power is, in no way, concerned herein, he being under promise and compact to dispense and measure them out to men, according to the earnestness of their requests in seeking it, and their care in improving the same.

However arbitrarily therefore God may dispense to men their endowments and enjoyments in this life (being under the confinement of no promise herein), yet grace and sal-

vation

vation he hath obliged himself to dispense legally.

In expecting any thing hereof therefore from him, we must have recourse, not to any arbitrary power, or fancied secret decrees, but only to his revealed promises, and covenanted declarations ; whereto, as God will stand, so hereby we must stand or fall for ever.

Which surely is a doctrine no less comfortable than true, being agreeable to the goodness of the divine nature, for encouragement of human endeavours, under a paternal, not tyrannical government.

Such is the nature of the sovereignty of God, exercising an empire and dominion over his creatures most independent and infinite, resulting from the effects of that goodness, and power, and wisdom, whereby all things are and were made, in no way depending upon any superior, nor is he subject or accountable for what he does to any of his creatures.

It is absolute, because all the creatures receive what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodness, and therefore they owe all possible duty and perpetual subjection, so long as they continue in being, because it is solely by his power and goodness that they continue so to be. But,

Secondly,

Secondly, I am to prove it. This is universally acknowledged by the Heathens, that “God is the Lord, and Sovereign of the world, “and of all the creatures therein.”

Hence Plato calls him “the conductor of “all things;” and Tully, “Lord of All.”

And this the Scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him “Lord of All,” “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”

“Behold (faith Moses) the Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens is the Lord’s thy God;” and God himself (by the Prophet Jeremy) “Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, “so are ye in mine hand, saith the Lord.”

And the Psalmist (by way of humble acknowledgment to God) saith, “thy kingdom “is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion “endureth throughout all ages;” whom therefore St. Paul rightly stiles “the King eternal.”

Again, “Thou, Lord, art higher than all all that are in the earth, thou art exalted far above all Gods.”

Again, “His kingdom ruleth over all;” and in my text, “Who is over All, God, blessed “for ever.”

The testimony of our Saviour is remarkable to this purpose, “My Father is greater than “All.”

Truly

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Truly well therefore is it said that our Lord is a great God, and a “great King above all “Gods.”

To these and other proofs which might here be produced, we may refer all those doxologies in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to God.

I shall only mention further, that eminent confession of Nebuchadnezzar (a great king), who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge that “God was the “Most High.”

“God then remaineth a King for ever;” yea, “he is a Judge among Gods.” Our Church, therefore (in her song of praise, the “Te Deum”), stiles God “the Father of an “infinite Majesty;” and Christ his Son (who is co-equal with the Father in the divine essence) “the King of Glory.” And,

In the introduction of her prayer for the King’s Majesty, where (as in all other places) she admirably suits herself according to the subject of her request, she addresses God, our heavenly Father, under the exalted characters of “High and Mighty, King of Kings, Lord “of Lords, and the only Ruler of Princes;” and many other such like places.

What

What now remains is to see what inferences and improvements can be made from what hath been thus laid down ; and,

First, Is the dominion and government of God, as to power, absolute and uncontrollable ?

Then hence it follows, that none of his creatures ought, or can have any right to call him to account for any thing he doth ; for “ he gives no account of his matters to any,” “ nor can any say unto him, what dost thou ? ” The reason is evident, because all his works are done in equity and truth, and so no one can have any cause to question the equity or wisdom of them, or say (with the murmurers in Ezekiel) “ the way of the Lord is not equal.”

But further, the dominion of God (as already explained) is altogether comfortable and profitable.

First, It is altogether comfortable, since it assures us that God neither will, nor can do, any of his creatures the least wrong. For, if absolute sovereignty be also absolute justice, then are we sure that it cannot hurt us ; that he will not, by any his mere arbitrary will, impute that sin unto us, which otherwise would not be ours, and then condemn us to eternal torments for it. Yea,

Absolute

Absolute power being inseparably united to exactest justice, is the best and the only security we can have against suffering wrongfully; for it will do no wrong itself, and will rectify every ill done by inferior powers, which none but a sovereign and absolute power can do. In confirmation whereof we find, that men when injured and oppressed by others, naturally fly to God, and expect that his justice should plead their cause; to him they cry, when lying under affliction from the hands of men, and trust in him for a deliverance, from the oppression of their enemy.

Secondly, Absolute power being also absolute goodness, will do us all the good we can reasonably expect, even from the best of Beings.

If then it be so great a comfort to us to have a friend, who is eminent for power and wisdom, and also rich in goodness to us, to resort to in all our exigencies; if it be a signal happiness to any nation to be governed by a prince famous for all these perfections, of how much greater comfort must it be to live under the government of one absolute in Power, and infinite in wisdom, when we know that this power and wisdom will certainly be employed in expressions of kindness and good-will to all who do not absolutely refuse to become fit objects of his goodness. Hence it is natural for all

all to depend on the divine goodness, to fly to this great and general benefactor, for the supply of all their wants, to take refuge in his ability to do them good, and to render him their daily praises for all his kindnesses to them; and can there be a more true or comfortable representation of absolute sovereignty than this? Or, can any man have reason to dread the power more than to be afraid of that goodness from which it is inseparable?

Thirdly, Absolute sovereignty being the sovereignty of a God, rich in mercy to the sons of men, must induce sinners to hope in his patience, and be the strongest motive to engage them to turn unto him by repentance, in hopes of his pardoning mercy.

For, if even after his denunciation of destruction to an Heathen Niniveh, upon their “turning from their evil ways, he repented of “the evil which he said he would do unto “them; and did it not.” Yea,

If he had pity on that great city because “there were twelve thousand of little infants “in it, and also much cattle:” can we conceive that a God so gracious to the beasts that perish, can yet be so severe to the generality of the souls of men, as to leave them inevitably to perish everlasting? Can we conceive him so merciful to the little infants of an Heathen city,

city, and yet think him so cruel to myriads of myriads of other infants, both of Jews and Christians, as to condemn them to endless torments for that which they could never help? Sure 'tis not easy to conceive that a God so pitiful to the very beasts should have no compassion for the greatest part of fallen men.

Secondly, The dominion of God (as already explained) is as useful as it is comfortable; for,

First, It allays all our complaints, and silenceth all our murmurings against God's dispensations, in reference to all our temporal concerns; for,

He being the supreme Lord and Proprietor of all these things, may "do what he will with his own," and therefore may dispense them to whom he pleases, and in what manner and measure he sees fit; he also having given us a right to use them only during his good pleasure, whenever he is pleased to retake them from us; to retake from us what he so freely gave, we have just cause to be thankful to him that we enjoyed them so long, but none to be displeased or discontented, that he now calls for his own again; not to add,

That many times we ourselves, by our follies and vices, do greatly contribute hereto.

Here

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Here, then, in the first sense, we are in patience to possess our spirits, and acquiesce in his disposals, saying, with holy Job, (as the Greek most emphatically makes him speak) “the Lord gave, the Lord taketh away, as “it seemed good to the Lord, so is it; blessed “be the name of the Lord.”

And in the latter sense, to reflect, amend our ways, and be wise.

Secondly, This submission further becomes us, when he takes away our lives, or the lives of our friends around us; For,

Seeing it is he who “giveth to us all life “and breath,” and challengeth a propriety in our spirits, saying, “all souls are mine.” When he thus separates these souls from their respective bodies, he only takes away his own, (to wit) “the souls that he gave,” he being “the Father of Spirits.”

Thirdly, Hence we may easily learn what obligations we are under to yield obedience to the good will of God, according to our power, since he hath given us all those faculties by which we are enabled to obey him, and so must have a sovereign right to require us to use them for his honour and service. Yea, God (by virtue of his sovereignty and dominion over us) hath an absolute right to require all that love and obedience which man is able to

perform, because from him it was that he received all those faculties by which he is enabled to perform those duties;

For surely he must have a right to engage us to serve him with those faculties which he so freely gave us, to the utmost of our power.

When we render these to him, we do but
“ give him of his own; for, of him, and to
“ him, and through him, are all things.”

Let us therefore render him back the glory due, the tribute and praise of living to his glory.—But,

Fourthly, We may hence also easily discern how much we are concerned to improve those talents which God hath given us, to the ends and uses for which he has imparted them to us.

We are only stewards of them, and “ stewards (we know) ought to be faithful” in the employ of their master’s goods, not only for his honour, but according to his order. Yea,

God (by virtue of his absolute dominion over us) may justly require this from our hands, and that we be neither idle nor unprofitable servants in the work committed to us. And,

From the parable of talents we learn, that he expects that we should not “ hide them in a napkin,” or be unprofitable servants in the enjoyments of them, but improve them so far to his honour, and to the ends for which he

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he hath vouchsafed them, that, when he shall think fit to call us to an account for the use of them, we may so render it, as to receive the happy sentence of "well done, good and faithful servants."

Fifthly, Hence also we may find reason to acknowledge the equity of these commands of self-denial, and "taking up the cross," which seem so grievous to flesh and blood, since all that God requires by them, is only to part with that which he freely gave us, and which therefore he may as freely take from us again at his pleasure.

But when we view this in a further light, not only as by right required, but also in the nature of a virtue, and as a safeguard from sin, God having engaged himself by promise amply to reward it as an obedience which is due to him, on account of his absolute dominion over us,

When we view it in this light, what exceeding great reason have we not only to acknowledge, but even to adore the goodness of God, in his government over us.

Again, Hence we may learn how impossible it is that we should merit any thing from God, by any obedience or service which we pay unto him, since we perform it only by those faculties and aids which he hath freely given us,

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and

and so have only done our duty, and performed that which he had an absolute right to require from us. Upon the whole,

The natural effect of our belief hereof is to oblige us to be duly sensible, and always mindful that we are necessarily under the government of Almighty God, and none ever so much their own masters here, as possibly to be allowed to do what they list, or to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts, without controul or being accountable, as in a state of anarchy, or lawless condition, there being one Almighty God over the universe, "in whose hands are all the corners of the earth," and in whose kingdom therefore we must consequently reside; to whose will we are all subject, and the laws whereof we may not dispute, the proceedings whereof we cannot resist nor amend, and to whom we are bound by the most indissoluble bonds of allegiance.

To own and acknowledge God for our Lord and Sovereign, above all others to whom we are also subject, in all our ways, in every state and condition of life, at all times regarding, contemplating, and approving of his government, as the foundation of all the duties of religion, and without which men naturally degenerate into "workers of iniquity."

To

To yield him the duty and service of his subjects and vassals, in humble adoration of his Majesty, with all awful reverence, devout worship, intire trust, and most universal obedience.

To dread and beware of the great evil of sin, appearing hence not only a matter of simple folly, or private inconvenience (contrary to our reason), but also an act of high rebellion, and of public mischief, against our natural allegiance, and the peace and order of the world.

To submit (in case of offence and disobedience) quietly and patiently, without murmuring, to whatever shall be inflicted on us, as not happening to us through blind necessity or fickle chance, but as ordered for us by sovereign right and reason, that can do nothing rashly or unjustly. And, finally,

To be always exulting and rejoicing that we and all the world are under so just and gracious, and almighty government; it being well for the world, as for every particular nation and person therein, that "the Lord reigneth," and that "he is a King for ever," whose empire and dominion is the only security of their order and peace, directing governments, and restraining enemies on earth, "disappointing the wisdom "of the wise, and defeating the "power of the mighty; frustrating the tokens "of liars, and making diviners mad; turning

"wise men backward, and making their
"knowledge foolish."

Insomuch that we may say that the worst of times would be worse, were they not in God's hands, and that none can be really bad that are of his ordering.

To conclude; Seeing the dominion of God is productive of such effects; seeing that both the capacity of serving him, and also pleasing ourselves, is wholly derived from him, let us give unto him (as we are most bounden) the honour and glory thereof.

To him therefore, on account of his might, majesty, and dominion, be ascribed (as is most due) all honour, with praise and thanksgiving, in all churches of the Saints, for ever.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

Of the Happiness of GOD, &c.

ROM. ix. 5. “*God, blessed for ever!*”

SINCE all men naturally desire happiness, it is but reasonable (among our other disquisitions) to point out the fountain thereof, where it is to be found, and how to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it.

What Job says of wisdom may be also said of happiness: “*God understands the way of it, he knoweth the place thereof.*”

He only, who is perfectly possessed of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our search after happiness, the best way will be to contemplate and consider the divine nature, which is the only perfect pattern and idea of it, the original fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of.

To

To this end have I chosen these words, wherein the Apostle attributes this perfection of blessedness or happiness to God, in an eternal degree; "God, blessed for ever."

In speaking to this attribute, I shall propose these three things:

First, I shall shew what we are to understand by the happiness of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it.

Secondly, That this title belongs to God, i. e. that the divine nature is perfectly blessed and happy.

Thirdly, How far we his creatures are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means we may be made partakers thereof; after which I shall conclude with a few inferences from the whole.

First, I am to consider what we are to understand by the happiness of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it.

The notion of happiness (taken at the highest sense, as we must necessarily do, when we apply it to God) is no other than a fixed and an immovable state of contentment and satisfaction, of pleasure and delight, resulting from the secure possession and enjoyment of all that is good and desirable, i. e. of all excellency and perfection; so that these following ingredients

must

must be taken in to make up a perfect state of happiness, viz.

First, Perfect knowledge to understand what it is that constitutes happiness, and to know when one is really possessed of it.

For, as he is not happy, who is so only in imagination, without any real foundation for it; so neither (on the other hand) is he, who, though he hath all other ingredients of happiness, yet only wants this, and doth not really think himself to be so. This we often see, in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men, who have all the materials and circumstances of worldly happiness about them, yet from their unskilful management of them, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of their minds, not knowing when they are well, make even an hard shift, to be miserable and discontented in the midst of all these things.

But, God knows both what makes happiness, and that he is perfectly possessed of it. Again,

To perfect happiness is likewise required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happiness, and likewise to check and controul whatever would hinder or disturb it.

No being therefore is as happy as it can be, that is not all-sufficient for these things, and hath not within its power whatever is necessary

sary to an happy condition, whatever is necessary to secure and continue that happiness against all attempts and accidents whatever.

Again, Another ingredient required to perfect happiness is wisdom, to direct this power, and manage it in such a manner as it may effectually conduce to this end, this is very different from mere power (abstractedly considered), for we may have all the materials of happiness with us, and yet want the wisdom and skill to frame an happy condition out of them.

He therefore is not happy who doth not thoroughly understand the proper method and means of compassing and securing his own happiness. Again,

Another most considerable and essential ingredient of happiness is goodness, without which, as there can be no true majesty or greatness, so neither can there be any real felicity or happiness.

Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to communicate and diffuse itself, by making others partakers of its happiness, in such degrees as they are capable, and as wisdom shall direct.

For, he is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the pleasure of making others so, and of seeing them put into an happy condition by his

his means, which is the highest pleasure (I had almost said pride, but I may truly say glory) of a good man, of a good and great mind; for,

By such communications of himself, an immense and an all-sufficient Being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his power, but doth hereby rather enlarge and magnify the excellency of his Being, and gives to itself great ease and delight, without the least diminution of his own power or perfections.

But further, perfect happiness doth not only employ the exercise of goodness, but all other virtues also, which are suitable to so perfect a Being, i. e. God doth nothing that is contrary to, or unbecoming his holiness and righteousness, his truth and faithfulness; for, if he did contrary to them in any case, he would thereby create disquiet to himself; for, this is a certain rule, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature, without reluctance and displeasure.

This therefore we cannot imagine ever to befall so perfect and immutable a Being as God is.

Again, Perfect happiness implies in it a settled and secure possession of all those excellencies and perfections; for, if any of these were liable to fail, or be diminished, so much would

would be diminished also from the perfect and complete happiness of God.

If the Deity were subject to change or impairment of his condition, so that either his knowledge or power, his wisdom or goodness, or any other of his perfections could, in any way, decline or fall off, there would then be a proportionable abatement of happiness.

And, from all these result, lastly, infinite contentment and satisfaction, pleasure and delight, which is the very essence of happiness.

First, infinite contentment and satisfaction in this condition; and, well may happiness be contented with itself, i.e. with such a condition, that he that is possessed of it can neither desire it should be better, nor have any cause to fear it should be worse.

Secondly, Pleasure and delight, which is something more than contentment; for, one may be contented even under affliction, and in such a condition, as he may be far from taking any pleasure or delight in. "No affliction
" (as the Apostle says) is joyous for the pre-
" sent, but grievous."

But there cannot be perfect happiness without pleasure and delight in our condition.

Full pleasure is a certain mixture of love and joy hard to be expressed in words, but only and truly known by inward sense and experience.

Thns

Thus have I endeavoured to describe, according to our imperfect conceptions and expressions of God, the happiness of the divine nature, and wherein it consists. I proceed, therefore,

Secondly, To shew that this perfection belongs to God, and that the divine nature is perfectly blessed and happy. He is "a God, " blessed for ever."

This is so universal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very superfluous undertaking to manifest it with particular citations from the Heathen authors, nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity "the most happy and most perfect Being." Happy, because felicity doth naturally result from perfection; yea,

So thoroughly were they convinced of this attribute of the Deity, viz. that happiness was essential to God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to be attributed to God, and what not; to consider what things are consistent with happiness, or inconsistent with it; and whatever signified happiness, and was a perfection consistent with it, that they ascribed to God as a suitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwise, they

removed from God, as unfit either to be said of, or applied to him.

Whatever differences there were among the Philosophers concerning the perfections of the divine nature, yet they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it; yea, even those who so boldly attempted to strip it of most of its perfections, yet frequently own and profess to believe the happiness of it.

The happiness then of the divine nature was universally acknowledged. Blessedness is a perfection so inseparable from the notion of a Deity, that who ever professes to believe a God, must acknowledge him to be perfectly happy, to be "God, blessed for ever."

As to the testimonies of Scripture in the case before us, they clearly evince this perfection as essentially belonging to God.

The title of blessedness is frequently given to God and Christ as in St. Mark, where the High Priest asketh our Saviour, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And St. Paul, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for evermore." so likewise, in his Epistle to the Romans, "the Creator, blessed for evermore."

Which likewise is said of Christ in my text,
Of

"Of whom Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." Again, "God is called 'the blessed and happy God,' 'the blessed and only Potentate.'

It is certain then that blessedness or happiness is a title belonging to God, which is a sufficient foundation to the present doctrine.

But further, besides these texts already produced, the Scripture doth every where (by way of necessary consequence) declare the happiness of the divine nature, viz. wherever it speaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge and power, and wisdom and goodness, and righteousness, and of the eternity and unchangeableness of them, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in their enjoyment.

Having thus shewn the nature, and established the doctrine of the Happiness of God, I shall now proceed,

Thirdly, To see how far we his creatures are capable of his happiness, and the ways whereby we may be made partakers of the same.

We are not capable of absolute and perfect happiness, because that results only from infinite perfection, and which is no where to be found but in God. It remains therefore, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite

finite and limited degree, by a resemblance to God, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, thus qualifying themselves for the present and future favour.

As we are creatures of a finite power, limited understandings, and a mutable nature, we necessarily want many of those perfections which are the cause and ingredients of perfect felicity.

We are far from being sufficient for our own happiness: we are not so of ourselves, nor can we make ourselves so by our own power; for neither are we wise enough for our own directions, nor good enough for our own satisfaction.

All the happiness we are capable of, is by communication from Him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made partakers of the Divine Nature (as St. Peter speaks), by our resemblance of God in those perfections which are the most essential ingredients of happiness, (viz.) his goodness and righteousness, his truth and holiness, and the like. These do immediately qualify us for the favour of God, and the friendship of the Almighty, and for the blessed sight and enjoyment of him; not to add, the immediate happy effects of these good dispositions to us, in the present peace, serenity, and satisfaction of our own

own minds, together with the advantage, honour, and credit which they do immediately give us.

The means then to obtain happiness, can only be found in the way of righteousness ; and to be made partakers of the blessedness of God, is, to “do the things which he says” ; yea, “Blessed are they who do the commandments, “for they only have a right to the tree of life.”

Now, the favour of God, and the light of his countenance upon us, his friendship and good-will towards us, which can only be obtained by obedience through faith ; these do supply all the defects of power and wisdom in us ; for God being our friend, we have then an interest in all his perfections, and a security, that, as occasion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage ; so that, though we are “weak in ourselves,” yet are we “strong in the Lord, and in the power “of his might”; and are “able to do all “things, through him strengthening us :” tho’ in ourselves we are defective in all these things, yet we may have free recourse to the Fountain of Life, and “ask of God, who giveth to all “men liberally, and upbraideth not.”

And it is next to the having these perfections in ourselves, to know where to have them for

asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our happiness.

So that though our happiness depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourselves for it, (and God is always ready to assist us by his grace, to that purpose) it is really, and in effect, in our own power; and we are every jot as safe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were sufficient of ourselves.

However, this is the highest happiness that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects so liberally supplied by the bounty of another, to have a free recourse to the Fountain of happiness, and at last be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of Him, “in whose presence there is “fullness of joy, and at whose right hand “there are pleasures for evermore.”

Lastly, I am now to see what inferences can be made from what hath been thus laid down:

First, Is God for ever happy? and, Is our happiness only derived from Him?—Then,

This shews that atheism or infidelity is altogether melancholy and disconsolate, inasmuch as it takes away the fountain and only foundation of happiness, and the only perfect pattern of it: inasmuch as it endeavours at once to extinguish the Being of God, and all the

the life and comfort of mankind, so that we could neither form any idea of happiness, or have a possibility of obtaining it.

For, it is plain and evident that we are not sufficient for it of ourselves, and if there be not a God, there is nothing then that can make us so.

“God is the true light of the world,” and a thousand times more necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind than the sun itself, which is but a dark shadow or faint resemblance of that infinitely more bright and glorious Being, “the happy and only potentate, who only hath immortality dwelling in that light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see,” meaning in this mortal state.

So that the greatest enemies, and most injurious of all others to mankind, are those who would banish the belief of a God out of the world, and his happy presence from among us; because, this is to “lay the axe to the root of the tree,” and at one stroke to fell the whole superstructure, and cut off all hopes of happiness from mankind. So that he is a “Fool indeed who says in his heart there is no God.”

Secondly, If the Divine Nature be so infinitely and compleatly happy, this is a great confirmation

confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happiness of another life, which the scripture describes to us by the sight and enjoyment of God, and by a similitude unto Him, seeing as He is, so shall we also be, according to our capacity. As we are creatures, we are not capable of happiness absolute and infinitely perfect, because our nature is but finite and limited.

But “the blessed God”, who is infinitely happy himself, can also make us happy according to our finite measure and capacity.

For, as he that is the first and original Being can communicate being to others, so also He, who is the fountain of happiness, can convey suitable happiness to his creatures.

This is altogether credible, because the happiness of God himself consists in that propensity which rejoiceth in profusion of goodness, overflowing for the happiness of others.

If there can be any accession to that which is infinite, God himself finds a new pleasure and felicity in the communication of his goodness to his creatures, and therefore he is represented in Scripture as glad of the conversion of a sinner, since hereby he becomes capable of the happiness which God designed for the benefit of his creatures, and which he is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they

they become meet, and are qualified for it, which only by obedience, through faith, they can be.

So that the goodness of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a blessed immortality. It is happiness to the divine nature to communicate itself, and the communications of God's goodness is happiness unto us; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodness of God ought always to be represented to the greatest advantage; and we should endeavour to possess our minds with the most firm belief and persuasion of it. But,

Thirdly, From what hath been said concerning the happiness of the divine nature, we may learn wherein our own happiness consists, viz. in the image, and in the favour of God; in the favour of God, as the cause thereof; and, in the image of God, as a necessary inward disposition, and qualification for it.

Unless God love us, we cannot be happy; and "a wicked person (we know) is vile in his eyes; but the righteous are his delight." Yea, "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness." "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall any evil dwell with him." "The wicked shall not stand

"Stand in his sight, for he hateth all the workers of iniquity." Nay,

If we could suppose that God takes pleasure in any person that is unlike to him (which is impossible), yet that person could not be happy, because he would want that inward frame and disposition of mind, which is necessary to happiness; for,

The very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God, must, in an inferior degree, be found in us also, otherwise we cannot be happy.

A wicked man, wherefover he goes, hath a root of gall and bitterness within him, and therefore is, and must be, miserable from himself; yea,

There is a certain temper and disposition of mind that is necessary and essential to happiness, viz. holiness and goodness, which is the nature of God; and so far as any one departs from this temper, so far he removes himself from happiness.

As the divine nature, therefore, is the only perfect idea of it, so nothing less than our conformity to it can make us capable of it; for,

'Tis not the place, but conformity of temper, that causeth reciprocal pleasure.

This argument plainly convinceth men of the necessity of holiness and goodness, and all other

other virtues, in order to our present, as well as future welfare.

The author and fountain of happiness, He that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot (without contradicting the essential purity of his own nature) make us so, in any other way, than by planting in us such a disposition of mind as is (in truth) a participation of the divine nature, and by endowing us, with our own concurrence, with such qualities as are the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. Yea, there is no way to partake of the felicity of "God, blessed for ever," but by becoming holy, and righteous, and good, as he is.

All men naturally desire happiness, but thro' the folly and perverseness of their nature, they seek it "in barren and desolate places," where it never was, and never can be found.

"Many will say, lo here, or, lo there!" that happiness is in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and delight; but "believe them not;" happiness is something that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is within us, in our heart, and in the very inward frame and disposition of our soul, founded in peaceableness and purity, whose effects only are "quietness and rest, and assurance for ever."

In

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we must be like the blessed God; we must be holy and merciful, and good and just, as he is, and then we are secure of his favour; "for the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance will behold the upright." Upon the whole,

The surest foundation of love and friendship is (as we have seen) in a similitude of temper and disposition. God and man must, in some measure, be like one another, before they can take reciprocal pleasure. If, therefore, we be unlike to God, it is (in the nature of the thing) impossible that we should be happy. There must then be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeness. Now the nature of God is inflexible, fixed and unchangeable; the change consequently must be in us; yea, we must change ourselves, and endeavour to be like God, whose nature so wholly tends to goodness, in order to enjoy happiness; for,

Since he cannot depart from his holiness and purity (the blessed perfections of his nature) we must leave our sins, and be holy, as he is holy, if ever we hope to be happy, as he is happy.

Yea, "every man that hath this hope in him, will purify himself, even as God is pure, that he may finally be happy, even as God also is."

SERMON

SERMON X.

That God is Holy, &c.

PETER i. 16. "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

NEXT to the belief of a God and his Providence, there is nothing more fundamentally necessary to the right conceiving of God, and to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles, "that God is in every way holy; that he is in no way sinful, nor the author of sin;" and,

"That every man, from a consideration hereof, is obliged to think himself in duty bound to follow his example, and to be holy, not only because, but even as he is holy."

"Be ye holy, for I am holy." The principle that "God is holy, and in no way sinful, nor the author of sin," is the foundation of all religion; and seeing that the great design of God in chusing any people to be his

own peculiar, is, that they may be separated and distinguished from the world, " which lies in wickedness ;" seeing to be a Christian church, is (in the very notion of the original) to be of a society of persons, " called out of the world," and from the evil customs of it, to " live to God," and to shew forth his virtues in their lives and conversations.

Since this only is the true distinction betwixt a Christian and an Heathen, it must be matter of sad reflection to consider, that the distinction we now find betwixt too many who are called Christians, and those of other denominations, is rather in their doctrine, than in their lives; in what they know, rather than in what they practice; is rather in a fruitless faith, than in the fruits of obedience and holiness.

It hath been boldly asserted by the adversaries of Christianity, that the Christianity which now obtaineth in the world, doth nothing to reform and correct, and restrain the vices of it; and that so many, who stile themselves reformed Christians, should do so much to justify, and so little to confute, this accusation, is a consideration so exceedingly melancholy, that the thought of it cannot but excite " fearfulness and trembling!" For,

If,

If, indeed, we will not be unto God, a “peculiar people, zealous of good works;” if we will not distinguish ourselves from the world, “which lies in wickedness;” by the “being transformed in the renewing of our “minds,” and the purification of our manners, from the corruption that is in it, we may as reasonably expect that God should cease to be holy, as cease to be incensed against us. Yea,

Can we think that God will continue to be gracious to us, that he will continue to distinguish us from others, by his peculiar favours, and by the benign aspects of his good providence towards us, when we ourselves will not be distinguished from the impure Heathen, or the self-hardened Infidel, by our lives and conversations?

The arm of God, which can alone afford us help, is (by the Psalmist) styled, his “holy “arm”: he therefore will not stretch it out for the deliverance of an unholy people.

His promise, which ministers the truest comfort and support unto us, is, his “holy promise,” and so belongs not to the unholy.

His name, which hath respect to all his attributes, is, his “holy name,” and so can only be successfully invoked by them, who are in

life and conversation, or at least in desire and resolution, holy.

“He is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works,” and therefore can only be exercised in the promotion of righteousness and true Holiness.

If then we do sincerely wish to shadow ourselves under the protection of this our holy God; if we do really desire to live hereafter with him, who hath expressly said, that “without Holiness no man shall see him,” we must resolve to yield sincere obedience to the most reasonable precept before us; and “be holy, not only because, but even as he is holy.”

In the further prosecution of these words, I shall endeavour,

First, To shew the import of Holiness, as relating to God, and then,

Secondly, Confirm it (i. e.) prove that Holiness is an attribute of the divine nature.

Concluding with such inferences and improvements as may naturally result from the same.

First, Of the import of the phrase before us, “I am holy.”

There is some difficulty in fixing the proper notion hereof, because, though there be no property more frequently attributed to God in Scripture than this of Holiness, yet there is none

none of all God's attributes which divines have spoken more sparingly on than this.

The general notion of Holiness is, that it is a separation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use.

Thus the vessels of the tabernacle, and the vestments of the priests, yea, and even the priests themselves, were said to be holy; because they were separated from a common use to the peculiar and excellent service of God; and then,

As to the Holiness of good men, it is a separation from all moral imperfection, (i. e.) from all sin and impurity.

This, in the primary notion of it, is negative, and signifies the absence of sin, as appears in those explications, which the Scriptures give of it. The Holiness of good men is therefore explained, by their opposition to sin and impurity.

"Let us (says the Apostle) cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting Holiness;" where Holiness is opposed to all filthiness, sometimes it is expressed by the denial of sin, and all defilement: so we find "holy, and without blame" put together; "Holy, harmless, and undefiled."

'Tis true indeed, this negative Holiness implies something that is positive; it doth not

only signify the absence of sin, but a contrariety thereto; for,

We cannot conceive the absence of sin, without the presence of grace, for, "where no sin is, there is grace, and every good work." Whenever therefore we are made holy, every lust and corruption in us is supplanted by its contrary virtues.

Now, this habitual inherent holiness of good men, which consists in a separation from sin, and replete with all goodness, is a conformity to the Holiness of God; and by this we may come to understand what Holiness in God is.

It signifies the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is separated and removed at an infinite distance from all moral imperfection, and that which we call sin, i. e. there is no such thing as malice or envy, hatred or revenge, impatience or cruelty, tyranny or injustice; falsehood or unfaithfulness in God; or, if there be any other thing that signifies sin and vice, or moral imperfection, Holiness signifies that the divine nature is at an infinite distance from them all; yea, and that it is possessed of all the contrary perfections.

The Holiness of God then consists in an absolute and entire freedom from all impurity and

and iniquity ; yea, his nature is unchangeably averse thereto ; for,

As darkness stands opposed to light, and evil to good, so hath Holiness in God a necessary and essential opposition to all imparity, all “ filthiness both of flesh and “ spirit.”

To conceive otherwise of him, who is the spring and fountain, the rule and measure of all real Holiness, is to imagine, that corrupt streams may flow, even from the fountain of unspotted purity.

Besides, there is in God a perfect freedom, not only from all outward acting, but even also from an inward liking of, or complacency in the least iniquity. The Holiness of God, as it takes in his essential purity, as it excludes him, not only from all outward acts, but also from all inward liking of sin ; so it also implies his perfect hatred of it ; yea,

Contrariety of nature causeth contrary affections.

If the Holiness of God consists in acts of goodness, then sin must be an abomination to him.

To be holy then is to be good, both in will and deed ; is not only to love virtue, but to hate vice.

Fully

Fully to ascribe to God the nature of his Holiness, we must raise our thoughts to the height of the idea thereof; for, God is holy in all his works, and true and just in all his ways; and, being holy himself, yea, Holiness itself, all sin and iniquity must be for ever far from him.

In a word, God is essentially, infinitely, and perfectly holy; is one that can neither do, nor approve of any wickedness, and cannot therefore but love virtue wherever he finds it; yea, the very notion of God includes in it an everlasting separation and distance from all moral imperfection whatever, as inconsistent with all his other attributes.

Having thus shewn the import of the words before us, I am now,

Secondly, To prove that they immediately relate to God, that "God is holy." And this I shall do according to my usual method, and evince it.

First, From natural light.

Secondly, From Scripture, or divine revelation; and,

First, Without citing particular Heathen authors in confirmation hereof, it may be sufficient to observe that the Philosophers, in all their discourses of God, with one voice, and one mouth, declare it; they all agree in

this,

this, that whatever favours of vice, or imperfection, is to be separated from the divine nature at the greatest distance.

The Holiness of God hath appeared so evident to the reason of men in every age, that no one ever contradicted it; whoever hath acknowledged a God, hath equally acknowledged him holy, inasmuch as his Holiness and Being are co-existent together.

This one consideration, taken from the universal acknowledgment of mankind of the Holiness of God, plainly proves him to be holy; and that they reasoned well, is evident from hence; because the Holiness of God, as hath been already explained, is not a particular, but an universal perfection, and runs through all the moral perfections of the divine nature.

Yea, Holiness is his beauty, and the glory of all his other perfections; reason therefore sufficiently assures us of its authenticity and reality in God.

For, take away this, and you at once bring an universal blemish upon the whole of his Being. Without this (viz.) Holiness, power would be an oppression, and wisdom subtlety; sovereignty tyranny; and justice cruelty; yea, and mercy foolish pity. So manifestly doth Holiness come in to make up the essence of God, that if it was possible to take it away, we

should

should therewith immediately destroy God himself.

But this, to us Christians, will be further evidenced;

Secondly, From Holy Writ.

There is no title so frequently given to God in Scripture, and so often repeated, as this of his Holiness. His name, his arm, his promise, are all declared holy ; yea, he is styled Holiness itself ; “He is the Holy One of Israel,” being “righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.”

This title is given to each of the three persons in the blessed and adorable Trinity ; to “God the Father,” in innumerable places ; “to God the Son,” often ; yea, the very Devil could not deny him this title : “I know thee (says he) who thou art, the Holy One of God ;” and the Spirit of God hath this title constantly given it, viz. “the Holy Ghost,” “the Holy Spirit,” and “the Spirit of Holiness.”

The Scripture attributes this perfection to God in a peculiar manner : “There is none holy, as the Lord ;” “thou only art holy.” God then is eminently and transcendently holy ; is eternally and immutably so.

Having thus explained and confirmed the attribute of God’s Holiness, what remains is

to

to see what improvements can be made from the same.

The inferences which plainly follow from the consideration of the Holiness of God, are either such as tend to the information of our judgments, or the reformation of our lives. And,

First, From hence it is manifest, that God can do no evil, “ he being a just God, and “ without iniquity :” for, that which he hates unalterably, he can never will or chuse ; and what he can neither will or chuse, he surely can never be accounted to do ; not because he is weak in power, but because he is perfect in Holiness and Goodness.

It is impossible to be at two extremes together.

Now because God is for ever holy, therefore he must be for ever free from sin. Hence it follows,

Secondly, That God cannot command what is intrinsically evil ; for what are his commands, but declarations of his most holy will ? If then he cannot will what is evil, he cannot possibly command it ; yea, seeing it is sin alone, which makes us enemies to God, we may as well imagine that he should enjoin us to live at enmity with him, as to do what of necessity will make us so. Hence it must follow,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That God cannot secretly inspire us with any evil, or infuse any evil principle into our hearts; for,

Evil can never proceed from him, who hath an absolute and entire freedom from it.

It is more easy to imagine that bitter waters should proceed from the sweetest fountain, than that the bitter fruits of sin should issue from the purity of the divine nature; yea, and that the sun should cover the world with darkness, than that spiritual darkness should be derived from him, who is perfect light, “in whom is no darkness at all.”

“ Say not thou then it is of the Lord that I fell away, for thou oughtest not to do any thing he hateth.” “ Say not thou he caused me to err, for he hath no need of the sinful man.”

Fourthly, Hence also, as God is holy, it is certain that he cannot incline, excite, encourage, or effectually tempt or entice any man to sin; for then he must excite men to perform the “abominable thing which his soul abhors,” and to do that which he deters all men from doing, by the severest threats. “ Let no man, therefore (as the Apostle says), say when he is tempted to sin, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man to it.”

Hence

Hence it must therefore further follow, that God cannot necessitate or compel a man to sin, because this would be to make him the author of it, and is what would take off all the due deserved punishment of transgression, and make void every precept and promise which are offered for the encouragement of obedience, and consequently make God unholy.

This therefore (as God is holy) cannot be ; God can neither command, secretly inspire, tempt, nor necessitate men to sin, and that, because he is holy, and would that we should be holy also.

Again, Besides these inferences touching the freedom of God, from willing and doing sin, and from enticing others thereto, we may hence also learn, that there is a moral difference between good and evil.

If Holiness be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of God ; if, in the notion of God, there be included an everlasting separation from all moral imperfection, and an eternal repugnance to all sin and iniquity ; then, from hence we may infer, that there is an intrinsical good and evil in all things ; that moral good and evil do not depend upon any mutable or inconstant principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indispensible. As Holiness and goodness are necessary and essential

tial properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of these, viz. malice and envy, and unrighteousness and falsehood, and the like, must imply an essential repugnancy thereto.

As God is for ever holy, therefore sin must be for ever evil.

But further, if Holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of God, then this shews what account we are to make of sin, of wickedness, and vice. Holiness and sin are opposed to each other as much as light is to darkness.

Now, as light is pleasant, and darkness dismal, so is Holiness the highest perfection of any nature, and sin the lowest debasement of it; because it is the most opposite to, and at the furthest distance from that which is the first excellency and chief perfection. Again,

This should rectify our judgment and esteem of things and persons. We admire and esteem riches and power, and greatness, and scorn and contemn poverty, yea, grace and holiness, if it abounds not in the things of this world.

" Foolish men that we are, and unwise," to bestow our judgments according to fickle Fortune. There is nothing that can be a foundation of real respect, that ought to command our reverence and esteem, but real worth, excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to bestow our respect, and

and raise our esteem. "Let not the wise man then glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the rich man in his riches ; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth, and doth the thing that is lawful and right :" For, "in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

I do nat speak this to undervalue any that are advanced in this world, or to lessen the respect that is due to them ; sin only I would bring down, sin, wickednes, and vice.

As to those who have worldly advantages to recommend them, I would advise them to add religion to their riches, and Holiness to their honour, that they may be truly valuable ; that they may be truly rich and honourable indeed.

This inference, as it shews us the value of Holiness, may be further improved in cautioning us not to deride Holiness in any.

True Holiness in ourselves will beget in us an honourable esteem for, and strong affection to, all them that fear the Lord, and who give convincing demonstrations of a sincere and constant piety :

For if God himself be amiable to us for the purity of his nature, then he who most resembles Him in Holiness, must therefore be most amiable in our eyes. If men therefore of

a conspicuous character and of an exemplary Holiness be distasteful to us, we have great reason to suspect that we want that Holiness in ourselves which we thus disaffect in others:

For whoever looks upon the Holiness of the creature with an evil eye, can have no love, in truth, to it in the Deity.

He that contemns the Holy Dispositions in the imperfect pattern, must slight it more in the Original Perfection; and what he contemns and disavows in others, he cannot, even in charity, be supposed to have himself.

If Holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then how absurd and unreasonable is it, to scorn and despise it; yea, wicked and blasphemous!

The world is much blinded—Men do not see the great evil of sin, or the beauty and excellency of Holiness: But,

That they should be so infatuated as to change the nature of things, and “call evil ‘‘ good, and good evil,” is truly pitiable.

That sin, which is the vilest thing in the world, should be esteemed and cherished, and reckoned amongst the excellencies and accomplishments of human nature; and that Holiness, which is so great a perfection should be a name of hatred and disgrace.

That

That that which is the glory of heaven, and the most radiant perfection of the divine nature, and of consequence ought to be the chief aim and glory of man, should be matter of scorn and contempt, is truly shocking to every pious man, and must be so provoking to God, that he cannot but surely execute on such the severity of his wrath and indignation.

Do we think that the holy and just God will pass by these affronts and indignities of his most pure nature? nay, in this we do not despise men only, but God, whose image it is.

It is impossible to contemn that which God accounts his glory, without reviling the divine nature, and “doing despight even to God himself.”

Malice therefore against Holiness, true and real Holiness, reacheth heaven, and is levelled against the Most High.

But further, as the holiness of God is exerted in acts of real goodness, we may hence learn wherein true piety consisteth.

Negatively we say, we are not holy, only by praying that we may be so by willing and desiring it; or only by talking of good things, or by hearing and reading pious discourses with attention and delight: for, these things are but too often separated from true and real piety: “I speak it to our shame.” “The

" good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good."

We therefore certainly cannot conclude that we are holy, only because we desire to be holy.

" The stony ground received the word with joy, yet brought forth no fruit to perfection."

If therefore our desires be not seconded with sincere endeavours after Holiness; if our good words are not attended with good works; if we do not as well delight to practice as to hear and talk of piety and goodness, the root is still wanting in us.

It is not whoso willeth, but " whoso doth the commandments shall be blessed." And therefore,

Positively we say, that then, and then only, are we holy, when sin is so far mortified in us, that we " do not obey it in the lustings thereof," when we are so happily averse to all sin and wickedness, that we can take no pleasure therein, and are grieved at the very heart as oft as any " root of bitterness" ariseth within us; when we hate sin with a perfect hatred, and cannot look upon it in ourselves without abhorrence, nor in another without trouble; when we dare not indulge it, or connive at it in the nearest relation, the greatest

greatest friend, or most profitable companion; but are enemies to it “without respect of persons;” when we chastise, and even take vengeance of it in ourselves, by denying it altogether, and by the frequent exercise of every virtue most opposite unto it, and do all that in us lies to check and withhold our brother from it:

Happy, thrice happy is the man, whose heart, and whose affections are thus truly alienated from all love to sin; who doth not “yield the members of his body,” nor the faculties of his soul, “instruments of sin unto unrighteousness,” but rather “instruments of righteousness to God unto Holiness;” for, “He having his fruit unto Holiness, will, in the end, have everlasting life.”

The practical inferences which we may make from what hath been already said, are briefly;

First, From the Holiness of God, and the nature of Purity, we may learn the absolute necessity of real goodness.

Is there in God an absolute freedom from sin, from all evil, and all liking thereto?

Then, can I not be like him, whilst I regard iniquity in my heart?

Is sin that which God loathes and abhors?

Then can we not indulge ourselves in any sin, but

but we must thereby render ourselves the objects of his just displeasure, and even be abhorred by an holy God.

Doth God's Holiness and justice oblige him to the punishment of evil doers? Then must we be as much concerned to abstain from all iniquity, as it concerns us to avoid his sore wrath and severe displeasure, who is (unto the wicked) "a consuming fire."

But further, the Holiness of God, as it deters us from sin, so it invites us to be good.

Is God holy? then let us imitate his holiness. This is the inference in the text before us, "be ye holy, for I am holy."

Let us therefore labour after a conformity to God in this attribute; for, tho' we cannot reach to that perfection of Holiness which is in the divine nature, yet we may have that Holiness in truth, in which his image doth consist, which is the utmost that God in this imperfect state expects from us.

The Scripture sets us the pattern of the holy angels for our obedience; but it proposeth only the Holiness of the Father, and the Son, to be the object of our imitation, as being both the best of patterns, and the highest motives to an holy life.

For, what can be more excellent, or noble, than to live by the example of the Deity?

What

What can so much advance our nature, as to be "perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect?"

This exhortation might be enforced from divers considerations, which (would time permit me) might here be very fitly enlarged on.

But, knowing that we hereby do honour to ourselves, that we hereby become the sons of the Most High, yea, and honour God also; That it will entitle us both to the present and future favour of the Almighty; and that "without Holiness, no man can see the Lord,"

These considerations, though but barely mentioned, should be sufficient to induce us hereto. But further, Is God holy? yea, "holy and reverend is his name;" then must we approach him with profound reverence, and awful respect; and, upon no wicked nor unwarrantable purpose, but make purity the aim of all our pursuits, and the subject of all our requests; for,

His Holiness (which is so high) will convince us of our own infirmity and folly; and will consequently make us humble under the highest attainments; will convince us of the invaluable price of virtue; and will consequently cause that we make it the object of all our aims and desires.

For,

For, what is man in his best estate, when compared to the Most Holy, who inhabiteth eternity? or, with virtue, what can be compared unto it?

Lastly, the Holiness of God is at once both a comfort to the good, and a terror to the wicked. The good, by their righteousness and Holiness, by their mercy and goodness, demonstrate that they "are the children of God, and if children, then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

But "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." "God hath no pleasure in wickedness, neither shall any evil dwell with him." God is far from an indifferent temper towards sin and wickedness; for, "he hates all the workers of iniquity," and "will utterly destroy all them that do evil."

Upon the whole, this may convince us of the purity of the divine nature, and of the intrinsical good and evil in things. This may rectify our judgment and esteem of persons and things, and may recommend holiness to our imitation and practice, as the highest excellency and perfection, and as an essential and principal ingredient of happiness. It may likewise thunder terror against all unholiness and wicked persons, comforting the good, and admonishing us never to approach God, but with

the

the most profound reverence, nor upon any wicked or unwarrantable design, always making Holiness the chief of our requests: That "as he which hath called us is holy, so we also may be holy, in all manner of conversation."

SERMON

THE DOCTRINE OF THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

SERMON XI.

Of the Immutability of God.

MALACHI iii. 6. “*I am the Lord, I change
“not.”*”

THESE words, if considered with relation to the context, are a powerful motive to engage us to repentance: God here representing himself to us as a God of judgment, bearing an unchangeable hatred to all workers of iniquity; and though he, with much patience, forbears to execute his threatened judgments, yet will they certainly, in their due season, fall upon those who rebel against him.

But, it is not so much my design to speak to these words in this light, in the first place, as it is to establish from them the attribute of God’s Immutability.

However, that both these ends may be accomplished, I shall treat on them in the following order.

First,

First, I shall explain what is meant by God's Immutability.

Secondly, I shall shew that this is a perfection essential to God.

After which I shall,

Thirdly, Answer an objection or two, which hath been usually brought against it.

Concluding with what improvements can be made from the whole.

First, Of the import of the phrase, "the Immutability of God."

The Immutability of God respects both his nature, his attributes, and perfections.

God always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the same; he undergoes no changes, either of his essence or being, or of his properties and perfections. God is always what he was, for "infinite perfection alters not."

The Apostle St. James represents this to us under a very elegant similitude: "Every good and perfect gift (says he) cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

The comparison is truly elegant, drawn from the consideration of that which, in corporeal things, is the least subject to change, viz. "the sun shining in the heavens."

The sun is the greatest, the most regular, the most stable and constant dispenser of light

and heat, and fruitful influences upon the face of this inferior world ; yet is his influence varied by different motions, by days and nights, by winter and summer, by clouds and shadows, yea, and even by alterations within its own body.

But God, the Father of spiritual lights, the author and disposer of all good and perfect gifts, has in him no uncertainty, nor alteration of any of his perfections, “he hath no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” But,

Secondly, For proof of this, that God (in respect of his essence) is absolutely unchangeable, may be proved from hence, because his being is necessary, and his essence self-existent. For, whatever necessarily is, as it cannot but be, so it cannot but continue to be invariably what it is.

That which depends upon nothing, can be affected by nothing, and consequently cannot be changed.

As to those perfections of his, viz. his power, and knowledge, and wisdom, and other his natural attributes, that they are equally unchangeable is evident, as they flow necessarily from his essence, and depend not on his will, because whatever necessarily flows from any cause or principle, must likewise (of necessity)

cessity) be as invariable, as the cause or principle from which it necessarily proceeds.

Concerning those other perfections, the exercise whereof depends upon his will, such as are his justice, his veracity, his goodness, his mercy, and all other his moral perfections; the absolute Immutability of these is not indeed so obvious and self-evident, because it depends on the unchangeableness not only of his essence, but of his will also.

Nevertheless, upon careful consideration, the unchangeableness of these likewise will no less certainly appear.

Because, in a Being who always knows what what is right to be done, and can never possibly be deceived, or awed, or tempted, or imposed upon, his general will and intention of doing always what is best, and most fit and right to be done, will, in reality, though not upon the same ground of natural necessity, yet in event, and upon the whole, be as certainly and truly unchangeable as his very essence itself. The decrees, the counsels, the purposes and promises of God being all of them the results of the exactest justice, and goodness, and of that wisdom which foresees all possible circumstances; no unseen circumstance therefore can happen, whereby to move him

either to change his purpose, or to alter his decree.

All finite beings are frequently forced to change their designs, because they often find it impossible to finish what they begin, or unreasonable to pursue it to its end.

But, in God these things have no place.
But further,

As God is unchangeable in his essence, and in the great and general perfections of his nature, and in the particular decrees and purposes of his will, so is he likewise in his laws, and in his promises and threats, which are all founded in eternal rectitude, even upon the original, fixed, and permanent designs and intentions of an all-wise Providence, and that because his love to virtue and goodness is unalterable, and his hatred to vice irreconcileable. But,

Besides the arguments drawn thus from the nature of the thing itself in proof thereof, there are also others equally consonant from reason also; as

First, The author of all things being (in himself) possessed of all perfections, must be unchangeable; he cannot change for the better, because he hath already, in himself, all excellencies.

He cannot change for the worse, because he can neither have a will, nor a power to hurt himself; nor are other beings able to hurt him, or diminish from his perfections, since they have no other strength or power than what he gave them, and do all receive their nature, their qualities, and perfections from him.

Besides, nothing argues greater weakness and imperfection than inconstancy and change.

This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain.

This is the vanity of the world in general, that "the fashion of it passeth away," and of man in particular, who is liable to so many natural changes by age, by diseases, and death, that, (agreeable to the expression of the Psalmist of him) in his best estate, "he is altogether vanity."

And also to so many moral changes, being deluded and deceived in his understanding, and so often changeable in his purposes and resolutions, according to the alteration, or appearances of things, that he is very fitly represented to us by the Apostle as "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind."

Now, if the divine nature were subject to change, this would cast an universal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obscure all his other perfections, and make them like

the flower of the field, which, however gay and flourishing, or glorious, is yet fading and of no continuance ; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would Mutability be ; for, as the corruption of the best things is the worst, so the better any thing is, the worse it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

But further, As the Mutability of God would darken all his other perfections, so would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion. The ground of our faith, of our hope and fear—the ground of our love and esteem of God, would be quite taken away by it.

We could have no great honour or esteem for a Being that is as fickle and inconstant as ourselves.

If his power and justice were uncertain, his threatenings would, in a great measure, lose their force with us. If his truth and faithfulness could fail, no promises nor declarations, how gracious soever, would be any security, or firm ground of trust and confidence to us.

This reasoning is not the result of divine revelation, but is clearly founded in the natural notions of our own minds, as might be made sufficiently apparent, by citing some few

testimonies to this purpose, from those who had no other guide but natural light to direct them.

"God (say the Heathen Philosophers) is always the same, is always alike."

Again, "That which is the best and most perfect Being, is not liable to any alteration, and such a Being is God." "He cannot be changed by any thing; yea, he cannot will to change himself."

Of the Immutability of God's councils they speak thus: "The Gods make unchangeable decrees, and never repent them of the first council."

Thus reason hath taught all men to conclude that God is unchangeable.

Secondly, The holy Scriptures also teach us the same; they do not indeed often enter into the philosophical part of this speculation, and endeavour to prove by strict and methodical reasonings that it must be so; but they affirm that it is so in very strong expressions. They tell us that God is unchangeable in his nature and perfections, in all his decrees and purposes, and promises.

In his essence and being God speaks thus of himself: "I am that I am;" "This is his name whereby he is called;" and again,

"I am the Lord, I change not." "From everlasting, therefore, to everlasting, thou art."

“ art God ;” “ thou art the same, and thy
“ years fail not.”

“ Every good and perfect gift is from above,
“ and cometh down from the Father of Lights,
“ with whom there is no variableness, neither
“ shadow of turning.”

God is immutable likewise in his perfections. Hence it is so often said in the Psalms, that “ his goodness and mercy endure for ever ;” yea, and his righteousness also. They are like the great mountains, not only visible and conspicuous, but also firm and immoveable ; the same likewise is said of his truth and faithfulness : “ His righteousness endureth for ever,” and “ his truth or faithfulness from generation to generation ;” and of his power, it is said, that “ in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” So likewise is he in his decrees and purposes. “ The council of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

“ Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.” “ God is not a man that he should lie, or as the son of man that he should repent.” “ Hath he spoken, and shall he not do it ?” “ Or, hath he said, and shall he not bring it to pass ?”

If he hath made any promise, or entered into any covenant with us, it is firm and immutable: "He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth." His covenant and promise are in themselves immutable; "are in him, yea, and Amen." "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And,

For our further assurance herein, God hath given us his oath, the highest sign and assurance of Immutability. So the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, "that by two immutable signs, viz. his promise and oath, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope which is set before us."

God then is immutable, not subject to any change, with respect either to his essence, being an incorruptible spirit, or his knowledge, being omniscient; or, in respect to duration, being eternal; or, in regard to place, being omnipresent; but especially in regard to his will and purpose, wherein is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" all change being in the creature, but never in the Creator, to which his perfection is an invincible bar; a change for the better, arguing him not perfect before; and for the worse, making him cease to

to be perfect afterwards; therefore he saith of himself, "I am the Lord, I change not."

God then, as to his perfections and counsels, promises and threats, is immutable; but,

To reconcile this to those scriptures and examples, in which God seems to vary from his promises, reverse his sayings, and to repent of the kindness he had done, or of the evils he had threatened to others, we must chiefly observe,

Thirdly, The answers we shall give to the objections which are made against this attribute of God's Immutability.

It is objected and said, that "God repented that he had made man;" that "he repented that he had made Saul King." "When the Angel had stretched out his hand over Jerusalem, to destroy it," it is said, that "the Lord repented him of the evil," and other similar quotations, which might be here produced.

To all which we answer, that we are to understand these expressions of God's repentance after the manner of men, and as spoken by way of condescension and accommodation to our weak capacity, and not as casting any imputation of Mutability and inconstancy upon God, as if, out of levity, or for want of foresight, he altered his mind.

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When God, therefore, is said to "repent that he made man," or the like, the change was not in him, but them : It doth not signify that God was absolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reasonable expectation, and therefore the Scripture clothes God with the human passion, of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as men usually do, when they are greatly disappointed, and fall short of their expectation.

As for the other instances, wherein God is said to repent him of evils threatened, we are to observe, that all God's covenants and promises made to man, and all his threats against him (which refer only to this life, in which man still continues in a state of trial), though in words they be sometimes absolute, yet in sense are conditional. God's threats and promises have always a regard to the behaviour of men, and have a condition implied, if not expressed ; so that those who fall off from virtue to vice, instead of being heirs to his promises, become entitled to his threats ; and those who return from vice to virtue, instead of being obnoxious to his threats, become entitled to his promises. The change is not in God, but us.

This doth not in any way derogate from the constancy and Immutability of God ; for,

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When God did promise or threaten, He spake what he did really purpose and intend, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened.

Whence it is evident, that the promises made by God to righteous Persons, are only made to them upon condition, as “not turning away from their righteousness, to commit iniquity; and,

The evils threatened to the wicked are only threatened to them, when not “turning away from their iniquity, to do that which is lawful and right.”

Whence it is also evident, that when the promises of God (made to the righteous) are not performed, or his threats against the wicked are not executed, this doth not happen through any change in God, but only thro’ a change in man; the promise only failing because they to whom it was made cease to be the proper objects of it, by ceasing to be the same righteous persons which they were before. The evil threatened being reversed, because they (to whom it was threatened) cease to be the impenitent sinners they formerly were, and so cease to be the proper objects of those threats.

In proof whereof divers instances might be produced, as in the case of Eli, and of Nineveh, particularly that famous passage recorded in

in Jeremiah, "at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it."

"If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."

"And, at what instant, I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it. If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them."

To the like purpose we have it recorded in Ezekiel:

"When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them, for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he die?"

Again, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

In both passages declaring the reversion of sentence, upon reversion of life and manners; and, the repeated declarations of our Saviour, of "rendering to every man according to his works."

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The immutable purpose and decree of the Almighty, the fixed and established rule of God, is to pursue virtue with reward, with praise and approbation, and vice with punishment and disgrace, through all the varying scenes of man's behaviour, which therefore we must constantly expect; and therefore upon a change in that, he alters his measures, not thereby becoming mutable, but continuing constant to his first resolution of punishing the wicked, and rewarding the good.

God's affection towards good or evil, virtue or vice, is therefore uniform and unchangeable. His promises and threatenings invariably follow these dispensations thro' all the changes of man's personal conduct.

Thus, good parents and princes, without any change in themselves, encourage or discourage their respective children or subjects, according as they change their behaviour for the better or the worse.

Thus laws themselves, which can have no affection, nor change of affection towards one person or another; yet, vary their effect, themselves remaining unvaried, and bring punishments or rewards according to the different behaviour of the person upon whom they are executed; only, with this difference, that laws can make no allowance for the after-repentance

ance of men ; and that, because the enactors of the laws themselves cannot ascertain the reality thereof.

But God is free from this imperfection, and inspects and sees every thing really as it is, through all the varying circumstances of their alterations, and therefore acts uniformly, according to the first purposes of his will, without change or variation, as fire, with one unvaried action, consumes the dross, but purifies and refines the finer gold ; and the same sun, with one continual heat, melts one sort of bodies, but hardens another ; so God, without any change or alteration in himself, punishes the wicked, when they so continue, and shows compassion towards the same persons, when they become truly and sincerely penitent, according to that standing rule proclaimed to us in his holy word.

“ Them that honour me I will honour,
“ and they that despise me shall be lightly
“ esteemed.”

God is now what he ever was, and ever will be, the same implacable enemy to sin, and terror to all impenitent sinners ; the same faithful friend to virtue, affording consolation to good men to trust in, and rely upon him ; giving the same encouragement to all to become such, in

order to come up to the divine terms of reconciliation, which it is impossible to alter.

The doctrine of God's Immutability being thus established, what remains is, to apply the same. And,

First, Is God immutable? then, the consideration hereof (compared with our changeable condition) must teach us to entertain modest and humble thoughts of ourselves, and to know ourselves to be, what we really are, most imperfect in all respects; in our bodies, which lie exposed to a thousand dangerous impressions and accidents from the things around us, and of themselves naturally tend to decay and dissolution; in our understandings, which are liable to error; in our memory, which often fails and forsakes us; in our friends and fortunes, which are most uncertain possessions; in our good dispositions, which (at the best) are not steady and uniform, but mixed and filled with many faults and defects.

Secondly, Since God is set forth in the Scriptures as the bright and perfect original, which in all things we should endeavour to resemble as nearly as we can, his unchangeable nature reminds us, that we should endeavour (like him) to be fixed and constant in all that is good, in our love of virtue, and in all
our

our lawful promises to one another. But further,

Is God immutable? Then, this speaks great and exceeding terror to all the wicked and ungodly, whilst they continue in their evil ways, since the Almighty sin-revenging God must (in this case) be unchangeably their enemy; for,

If God be unchangeably an holy God, he must then be for ever displeased with all the workers of iniquity, and so must for ever separate them from his blissful presence. If he be inflexibly a just God, and an ever righteous Governor, then must he ever deal with wicked men according to their works.

"The Lord indeed is slow to anger, and of great goodness;" but if the patience and riches of his forbearance will not lead them to repentance, he assures them (in the following words) that "he will by no means acquit them."

If he be a God that cannot lie, nor vary from the truth of any of his threats, whilst men continue in their sins, then they must feel the power of his wrath, and the weight of his Almighty arm.

Let us therefore, by sincere repentance and reformation from our evil ways, prepare ourselves to be the objects of his mercy.

For, let us know assuredly, whosoever we are, that if we are obstinately bent to continue in our evil ways, that God is as peremptorily resolved to make us the objects of his vengeance; yea, he will therefore do it, because we hereby presume against mercy, and hope to escape, though we persevere in iniquity.

Let but a sinner consider what God is, and the consideration of his unchangeable nature must needs terrify him; for,

He who is holy, and just, and powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter, nor put off any of those properties, but will for ever hate iniquity, and be an implacable enemy to all wickedness. And,

Is it not a fearful thing to fall into the hands of this holy, and just, and omnipotent God, who lives for ever, and can punish for ever?

“ If any man say I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, adding drunkenness to thirst,” going on securely in a course of intemperance, or any other sin, “ the Lord will not spare him, but his anger and his jealousy shall smoke against him.” “ God hath sworn in his wrath,” that “ unbelieving and impenitent sinners shall not enter into his rest;” and for the greater

greater assurance of the same, and that we may not think there is any condition implied in these threatenings, he hath confirmed them by an oath, "As I live, saith the Lord;" that by this immutable sign ("in which it is impossible for God to lie"), sinners might have strong terrors, and not be able to fly to any hopes of refuge.

Vain therefore are their hopes of mercy, who continue in those ways to which God threatens the severest of his judgments.

For, both his mercy and his justice are the mercy and justice of a governor prescribing rules and laws, on the observance of which only he will be merciful; the which therefore if we neglect to comply with, "there remains nothing but fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us."

Secondly, Is God immutable in his nature, unchangeable in his holiness, and doth he always act agreeably to those standing rules of righteousness which he hath prescribed in his word? Then,

It must be in vain for sinners to expect his favour till some change be wrought in them, or even to imagine that they shall be able, by their addresses, to incline him to shew favours unto them, whilst they continue "enemies to him by wicked works."²

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When we desire that he would do so, we pray against the purity of his nature; against the declarations of his will, and against the rules of his government.

Since then God changeth not, if we desire that either our persons or performances should be accepted by him, there must be a change in us, (viz.) in our affections; from a love to an hatred of every evil way; from a dislike to an approbation of the ways of piety:

In our wills, from a perverse and disobedient to a willing heart:

In our actions, from our obedience to sin in the lustings thereof to the laws of righteousness. In a word,

“ We must put off the old man with his works, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which (after God) is created in righteousness and true holiness;” and then, that God who is immutable, will be disposed to accept us; and that because he is unchangeably willing to do good to his friends, and to shew kindness to every soul that truly desireth, and uprightly endeavours to serve and please him: for, “ God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and ready to forgive:” “ He is unchangeably good, and his mercy endureth for ever.”

Thus

Thus is God gracious and merciful to all who truly turn to him : but if men will not submit to his terms, there is nothing before them but everlasting destruction—“ Nothing then remaineth, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them.”

God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace ; and if we will not come up to them, He is at a point ; He cannot change his nature, nor will He alter the terms of our salvation.

There is a perfect, and an eternal opposition between the Holy Nature of God, and that of impure sin.

It is impossible therefore that a sinner should be happy, till the opposition be removed. And,

To do that, there are but two imaginable ways, (viz.) either by changing God, or ourselves.

The nature of God, as we have already shewn, is inflexible, fixed, and unchangeable ; we must therefore change ourselves. God cannot recede from his own pure nature, therefore we must part from all our sinfulness and corruption.

God cannot quit his Holiness, therefore we must leave our sins ;

To which nothing affords it out. Yea,

Yea, since we can have no hope to change God, we must therefore change ourselves, and “be Holy as He is Holy, if ever we hope to be happy, as God also is.”

Let us therefore rectify, as far as we are able, through the assistance of the divine Spirit, our own corrupt natures, renounce all our former impure lusts, and no longer venture upon impossibilities, since the nature of God is essentially immutable.

God hath once condescended so far as to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, He can go no lower—He will not, He cannot put off his own nature to save us against our wills, and please rebellious, incorrigible sinners. But,

Thirdly, Is God unchangeable in his Nature, Attributes, and Counsels? This is a strong encouragement to continue firm in our obedience to him; or, in the words of the Apostle, to be “steadfast and immoveable, and “always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

For, as I have already observed, all God’s promises of spiritual blessings to the righteous depend on this condition, that they continue so to be; and therefore, whilst they continue so, they cannot doubt but that this “Giver of “every good and perfect gift” “with whom “there is no variableness, neither shadow of

“turn-

"turning") will still be ready to give those gifts to them as they have need, and are meet to receive them.

God is never wanting in his grace and favour to them that love him: "He will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that lead a godly life."

But then, He cannot engage Himself to continue his blessings to him who revolts from his duty, and who departs from his "righteousness to commit iniquity;" for this is contrary to his express declaration: "All his righteousness that he hath done formerly shall not be mentioned unto him; but in his sin that he hath since sinned, in it shall he die." It is contrary to the purity of the divine nature, and even the conditions of the new covenant, (viz.) sincere obedience and perseverance in it to the end.

Let us then by "patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality;" and the unchangeable fidelity of God will yield us a firm assurance of a future and complete happiness; for, "He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved." But,

Fourthly, As unchangeableness is an excellency and perfection in God, so in man, on the contrary, to change his opinion and manner of

of acting, when there is just cause so to do, is one of his greatest commendations: And,

The reason in both is the same, (viz.) that right and truth are to be followed unchangeably. As therefore God, who never can err in his judgment of right and truth, must consequently be unchangeable in his acting according to it—So, for the same reason, frail and fallible man, whenever he finds he has erred from what is true and right, must immediately return to it. But,

In things certainly and demonstrably true, or which, upon the fullest, clearest, and most careful examination, are found evidently and undeniably good, in these things men ought to persevere inviolably; to be “steadfast and unmoveable,” “firm without wavering;” and, “not to be like children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

For, Jesus Christ. (i. e.) the doctrine and gospel of Christ, is “the same yesterday, to day, and for ever.”

“Be not therefore (saith the Apostle) carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.”

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We must therefore be zealous and stedfast in the pursuit and practice of what is clearly and indisputably just and right. But,

Lastly, The Immutability of God will minister strong consolation to good men in all the changes and vicissitudes of the world : for, whatever they may be, “God will be good to “Israel, to them that are true hearted.” Their expectation relies on the unchangeable goodness and faithfulness of that God, “all whose “ promises are yea and amen,” truth and verity.

All other supports and hopes may fail us ; but God by no means can : “He will not “ suffer his faithfulness to fail : His covenant “ will he not break, nor alter the thing that is “ gone out of his mouth.”

We should therefore comfort ourselves in all our greatest necessities and extremities of life, with the consideration of the immutable goodness and faithfulness of God. The things of this world are mutable, even those things which seem most constant ; whether we look without us, or within us, we can find no true ground of comfort or confidence.

Without us, we can find nothing but what is subject to change ; men are inconstant, and friends are fickle, given to change as circumstances, opinions, or interests vary. Our riches

are uncertain ; St. Paul therefore adviseth us
“ not to trust in them, but in the living
“ God ;” thereby intimating, that He who lives
for ever can be the only true foundation of our
comfort, who must live for ever also.

If we look within us, we shall find that we
are subject to great mutability ; we are in a
perpetual progressive change, from youth to
age, from health to sickness, from life to death :
but still our God is “ the same yesterday, to-
“ day, and for ever.”

This therefore should comfort us in all
changes, that God is still the same : youth and
health, riches and friends may forsake us, but
God hath promised that He will never leave
nor forsake us : “ When our strength and
“ our heart fail us, then is God the strength
“ of our heart, and our portion for ever.”
“ With Him there is no variableness, neither
“ shadow of turning :” “ He is the Lord, and
“ changes not ;” therefore “ trust in him at
“ all times.”

SERMON

SERMON XII.

Of the Impartiality of God.

Rom. ii. 11. “*There is no Respect of Persons with God.*”

THREE are many passages in Holy Scripture which, at first view, seem scarcely reconcileable with matter of fact.

My text may possibly be one of them ; for, how (it may be said) is this possible, since all men are what God made them ; and since no one thing can more differ from another, than one person seems to differ from another ?

If we consider man in his body, his situation, his temper, his understanding and heart, and compare him with his fellow creatures, we shall find that more variety can scarcely be conceived, than is to be found in the human race.

If we are all the sons of the Most High, and God has the same good inclinations towards

all, and an equal degree of tenderness and affection for every creature that is the work of his hands, how comes it to pass that we find him so seemingly partial in the distribution of his favours?

If he hath “no respect of persons,” of one more than unto another, why do we not all partake in the same manner of his fatherly beneficence, at least where we do not forfeit our right by an undutiful behaviour?

If we look into the world, we shall often see many of the sons of men rioting in the midst of plenty and affluence, and provided for with a most unbounded liberality, being blessed with the possession of all that the heart can wish for, or the eye desire: they have an overflowing measure of every delight that can cheer the senses, and gladden the heart of man; insomuch that “the ear that hears them blesses them, and the eye that sees them bears witness unto them.”

Add to all this, that they have the blessings of health, and hearts to enjoy all their affluence.

When we look upon men in this light, we may almost imagine them as exempted from the laws of mortality, and, so far from sharing in the common malediction and curse upon Adam, and the misery of that species, we might

not unaptly think that God took delight in making them instances of his friendship and favour; whilst thousands of others that are their fellow creatures, cast in the same mould, created after the same image and likeness, having as noble and generous minds, as religious both in principle and practice, are depressed with all manner of hardships, and seem born into the world as if they were vessels of wrath, and created merely for the endurance of misery.

Such is the disparity we find between men in regard to their different shares in the blessings of fortune.

Let us now consider them as to the gifts of the mind, and we shall find as great inequality here also. The degrees of understanding wherewith men are endowed are almost as infinite in number as the men themselves.

There are some of so soaring and superlative a genius as to be able to comprehend within the wide grasp of their knowledge almost all the difficulties of nature, to discuss the most abstruse arguments, to resolve every objection, and account for every appearance, whether of nature or things; —

Whilst there are others (and those not inferior in number) to whose limited minds scarce any thing can be rendered sufficiently easy, whose ideas are so few and unconnected, so

weak and wandering, that they can scarcely draw a natural conclusion from the most plain and easy principle.

And yet these are all the offspring of one and the same God, who is said to be good to all, and to be “no respecter of persons.”

To clear up the divine Impartiality from the objections arising out of this diversity of conditions and capacities, I shall have recourse to the following division.

First, I shall ascertain a right notion of the fault which we call “respect of persons.”

Secondly, Prove the attribute before us, together with the matter of fact; and then,

Lastly, See what conclusions can be drawn from the same.

First, In order to ascertain a right notion of the fault which we call “respect of persons,” we must distinguish rightly between matters of mere favour, and matters of strict justice.

Amongst men, and in their intercourse with each other, favours and gifts (to which another has no claim) are free, and are either lawfully bestowed, or as lawfully withheld; and none can be accused as a “respecter of persons,” who makes one rather than another the object of his kindness, if he is guided by prudence, or by innocent affection. Indeed,

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It should never be forgotten, that what we call matters of favour, are oftener matters of justice and right; and that usually there are persons who have a fair claim to our good offices.

But yet, sometimes, as in the choice of friends and acquaintance, or of dependants, or in the disposal of what we have to give, we cannot keep company with, or employ, or oblige and assist every one, and may therefore prefer one deserving person before another who is perhaps equally deserving, without being “respecters of persons;” so,

If the Scriptures anywhere represent God, as acting by no other rule than that of his own will and pleasure, giving more or less power, or knowledge, or abilities, or wealth, to his creatures, and acting with absolute authority, like the potter who fashions the clay into this or that shape, it is to be observed, that matters of mere gift and favour are there represented, in which justice and equity are not concerned, and for which there can be no other rule than the will of the giver: this is to be resolved into the good pleasure of God, who hath a right, and doth what he will with his own, nor indeed without sufficient reasons, though to us unknown. But,

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It is not so in matters where justice and equity are concerned; in protecting or acquitting; in recompencing or correcting; in matters of trust, and when power and authority are committed unto us by the public.

Whosoever favours the guilty, or injures the innocent, or gives or refuses, takes or detains without a sufficient reason, or contrary to the eternal rules of right and equity, such an one is partial or prejudiced, or a "respecter of persons."

The same distinctions hold true in relation to God's dealings with his creatures.

His giving them more or less, his placing them here or there when he calls them into being, is a matter of mere favour; and no account should be asked or expected; and, what is called "respect of persons," hath nothing to do with it; especially as wise ends are hereby answered, and the due order and subordination of men is kept up and maintained in the world, and the benefit of the whole is consulted and preserved.

It is not every capacity which is fitted for every place, neither doth every disposition require the like treatment; God therefore (whose knowledge by far exceeds ours, and whose intimacy in things "reacheth from one end to another

"another mightily, and sweetly ordereth all things") in wisdom allots to every man according as best suits and becomes him, and what, upon the whole, shall be for the most good.

What is required, on our part, is, to make the best of that which God hath thought the best for us.

There are many passages in the Scriptures where God, with a wonderful condescension, submits these his actions to be tried by the sons of men, and makes even his own creatures his judges, thereby shewing that mere might is not the foundation of his proceedings, and appealing to the everlasting difference of right and wrong as proof thereof, which are discoverable by all rational beings.

But, in God's behaviour to his creatures, consequent to their behaviour towards him, he acts by the rules of justice and equity, and in this, his justice and equity will be so manifest, and shine so transparently through all his transactions with the sons of men, as perfectly to clear him from all imputations of partiality towards them.

If we examine the passages of Scripture to this purpose, where God is said to be "no respecter of persons," we shall find that this perfection is ascribed to him, not directly as

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he is Creator, but rather as he is the ruler and judge, and dispenser of rewards and punishments to the sons of men.

And so, with relation to men, when they are commanded not “to respect persons,” they are also considered, not as doing favours, but as exercising acts of dominion and authority, of justice and judgment, in a public, or in a domestic and private manner, impartial.

These considerations remove in a great measure the objections to God’s providence, and shew that he cannot be charged with partiality.

This argument being discussed, I shall proceed,

Secondly, To prove directly that God is, and must needs be impartial, from his own nature and perfections, and from Holy Writ, which expressly testifies the same.

First, All partiality ariseth either from vice, or from weakness and ignorance, and consequently it can find no access to an all-perfect Being.

As God is Almighty, Self-existent, Eternal, and Independent, all his creatures are at the same distance below him, that is, at an infinite distance.

Compared with each other, they differ in a vast variety of degrees; but, when compared with God, they are what finite is to infinite, and

and bear no proportion ; therefore he must behold them all with the same impartial disposition.

Before they existed, there was nothing that could recommend one more than another to his favour ; and after they were called into being, nothing but their diversity of behaviour could produce in him any different regard for them.

As he is perfectly wise, he must treat them according to the laws of wisdom, equity, and justice ; laws which are everlasting and invariable ; and not by the dictates of partiality, which are blind, fanciful, and mutable, and in many respects unaccountable.

As he is perfectly good, he considers them all as his offspring and children. He designed them for happiness, he created them to do them good, and nothing can hinder him from exerting this his beneficence towards them, except their own fault, and their own undutiful behaviour.

Thus the Impartiality of God appears from his own nature and perfections ; and,

The testimonies of Scripture are exceeding express to the same purpose.

According to the definition already given of Impartiality, that it hath no place in matters of mere grace and favour, but only of justice and equity, of debt and desert, the Scriptures every

every where speak, in respect to God, and that in the strongest terms.

“ The Lord our God is God of Gods, and
“ Lord of Lords, a great God, mighty and
“ terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor
“ taketh rewards.” “ There is no iniquity
“ with the Lord our God, nor respect of per-
“ sons, nor taking of gifts.”

“ He that is Lord of All (saith the wise
“ man), shall fear no man’s person, neither
“ shall he stand in awe of any man’s greatness,
“ for he hath made the small and great, and
“ careth for all alike.” He hath the same re-
lation to all mankind, as a Father, a Lord,
and Saviour. “ Have we not all one Fa-
“ ther? Hath not one God created us? He
“ is the same Lord over all, rich unto all that
“ call upon him.” Again,

“ Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wick-
“ ed? or to princes, Ye are ungodly? How
“ much less then to him that accepteth not
“ the persons of princes, nor regardeth the
“ rich more than the poor, for they are all
“ the work of his hands.”

Again, “ who will render to every man, ac-
“ cording to his works,” “ for there is no
“ respect of persons with God.” Again

“ Of a truth I perceive that God is no re-
“ specter of persons, but in every nation, he
“ that

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" that feareth him, and worketh righteousness,
" is accepted with him."

And the Apostle, in his epistle to the Ephesians, presleth the duties of servants to their masters, and of masters to their servants, from the consideration that " whatsoever good any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free; neither is there any respect of persons with him."

He makes this likewise an argument why men should not oppress, nor deal deceitfully one with another: " He that doth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; for, there is no respect of persons."

And, in general, St. Peter urgeth this consideration upon all men to deter them from sin in every kind: " For God, without respect of persons, will judge every man according to his work." There is no respect of persons then with God.

This attribute being thus confirmed, I shall proceed to shew,

How agreeable it is with matter of fact, and with the common experience of all things.

And here, we might indeed take this for granted, when we consider, that " whatever is, either in the Heaven above, or in the earth beneath", is all by the direction, or permission at least, of an all-wise God, and must

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therefore certainly be right, though it be past our finding out.

But, not to rest the matter here, I shall endeavour to shew,

First, under this head, that the difference between God's dispensations to men is not so great as appears to be, even in this present life. And,

Secondly, That the Impartiality of God, whatever difficulties may here attend it, will be fully cleared up hereafter.

The present diversity of conditions amongst men is so uncertain and variable, and lasts for so very short a space, that it becomes, in this view, far more inconsiderable than is usually imagined. How trifling are all temporal and transient conveniences and inconveniences, when compared with the endless duration that opens before us!

It is our future lot and situation that alone can determine us upon the whole happy or unhappy. But,

Besides this, even the present and temporal condition of men is perpetually varying, and nothing is permanent and durable: but all men (more or less) pass through the vicissitudes of what we call good and evil.

Nor

Nor is this all yet, for even temporal happiness depends not so much upon externals as we are apt to imagine.

Many other circumstances are to be taken into the account, and which perhaps, upon the sum total, will make the pleasure and pain which they experience to be nearly equal; for,

We are to consider that the same things do not convey happiness or misery to men of different tempers.

Riches (in general) are things desireable, and poverty is an heavy burthen; but yet the desireableness of the former may be much diminished, and the burthen of the latter greatly lightened.

Where man has moderate views, and but a small degree of ambition, a grandeur of living and magnificence of expence has not that variety of charms to him that it hath to another.

The constitution of a man's body, or the capacity of his mind, may possibly be such, as not to coincide with an affluent abundance; and where then is the glory of his boasting? or where is the room or cause for us to envy his greatness?

At the most, the care and anxiety which riches occasion, and the many temptations to which men are endangered by their means, together with the account they must one day

give of all the talents committed to their trust; these do more than over-balance the glory of possession.

Thus it is with the rich, whilst the poor man, on the other hand, acquires health by his labours, and enjoys the fruits thereof with content and peace, “being himself ignorant of all their devices;” and all this without having great accounts to answer, either for the use or abuse of the things before him.

Neither is there much difference with respect to the learned and the unlearned. The man that hath more wisdom is also more sensible of the stings of affliction, and finds out a thousand reasons of sorrow (agreeable to that of the wise man) which would pass unobserved by an ordinary genius; and, after all his researches, finds himself many times perplexed with inextricable difficulties, whilst a less discerning man, in the mean time, is plodding on in an happy, thoughtless security, with just sense sufficient for the discharge of his duty, in that narrow sphere in which Providence hath placed him. Add to all this,

That “unto whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required; and unto whomsoever little is given, of him will be required the less.”

This
verb one sum verb requires one diff'rent
verb.

This is the voice of reason, and this the express declaration of our Lord and Saviour.

This removes much of the disparity of conditions, and makes it an ambiguous point, which of these stations is the more eligible; a point beyond all human skill to decide.

Who knows whether, in this view, the lot of the savage be not better than that of the philosopher; and the lot of the slave, than that of the king? But,

Thus much we know, that every one ought to be contented with that state in which his wife and good Creator hath been pleased to place him; and to conclude, that it is, and will be the best for him, if he makes a right, (i. e.) the best use of it.

Upon these suppositions the divine Impartiality stands fully justified.

Among the different conditions and ranks of men then, the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure, equal; and the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other than is commonly imagined.

In the lot of man, mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place. Providence never intended that any state here, should be either completely happy,

or entirely miserable ; but both together share in the things before us. In a state therefore, where there is neither so much to be coveted on the one hand, nor to be dreaded on the other (as at first appears) how submissive ought we to be to the disposal of providence in all things ! how temperate in our desires and pursuits ! and how much more attentive to preserve our virtue, and to improve our minds in religious knowledge, than to gain the doubtful and equivocal advantages of wordly prosperity !

But further, We are also to take into consideration, that “ natural evil,” such as pain and poverty, slights and disappointments ; these are not always real calamities, but are rather to be looked upon as just discipline and correction, tending to make men wiser and better, and in this respect, become rather favours than frowns.

One man may be more miserable than another in this life ; and the reason of this may be, because he requires a greater degree of misery to bring him to a due knowledge of himself and his duty, without which, he would probably perish forever.

God, who is omniscient, and knows us all, sees that the same means will not do with different tempers, and therefore, wisely and graciously dispenseth according to every man's need.

Add

Add to all this, that the evils of which men complain, are oftentimes evils of their own procuring.

The inequality of present earthly dispensations, whether of health or wealth, height of wisdom, or mere scanty natural parts, are in a great measure owing to the different dispositions of men, and are all of them in general to be considered as natural effects from their different applications.

"The hand of the diligent maketh rich," (as saith the wise man).

And again, "The observance of the commandment is health to the navel, and marrow to the bones;" and, "thro' application is wisdom attained."

If therefore men are idle, and have not, Is it for them to say to God, "I am forsaken?"

Or, If when suffering punishment, the just and natural consequence of their sins, to say, "Wherefore am I afflicted?" Or,

If "having never learned," can they with propriety say to God, "Wherefore is not the summit of wisdom given unto me?"

Virtue has a natural tendency to make men happy, and a natural connection with happiness.

This connection is sometimes suspended and interrupted by accidental causes, and by the iniquity of others in the present disorderly state

state of things; but usually, and upon the whole, the effects of goodness are highly advantageous.

Vice has the same connection with misery, or rather is more intimately united with it, insomuch that we may venture to say, that if the evils to which men are obnoxious were duly examined, and traced up to their originals, we should find that the greater part of them are the consequences either of thoughtless folly and indiscretion, or of deliberate wickedness.

These sufferings therefore are not to be charged to the divine administration, but entirely to those who bring them upon themselves.

For God to frustrate the natural and ordinary ways and means of his providence, and to act by extraordinary operations in favour and defence of men, contrary to what they can prudently expect, would be (in the most strict acceptation of the phrase) to "have respect of persons," which is far from the Almighty.

We have thus far considered the inequality among men, and shewn that it is consistent with the divine equity.

Let us now take another view of the question, and we shall see that men, in many respects, and with a few exceptions, are rather more upon the level, more like one another than we usually imagine.

All

All men are made after the same image, in the likeness and similitude of God.

They have all a mortal body, and an immortal soul; have all the same senses, and much the same powers and faculties.

They are all inhabitants of the same earth, and are all partakers of the common influences of heaven.

All men have the same ordinary means to improve and enrich themselves.

As they are reasonable creatures, they have the same great law, the law of reason to guide and instruct them.

As they stand equally in need of the divine assistance, they all have it, (as far as is necessary) and may secure it, if they behave themselves suitably to their station.

They are all subject to one supreme Governor, to whom they are answerable, and before whom they must all appear, and be accepted, or rejected, not according to the rank they held here below, or to the things which they possessed, but according to their conduct, their use, or abuse of the divine blessings.

Christianity indeed, or the knowledge of it, is rather matter of favour, than of absolute necessity, and therefore hath not been revealed to all.

But

But this ariseth from other causes, and not from the nature of Christianity itself, which, it is plain, was intended for universal use, as being adapted to mankind in general.

But where the gospel is revealed, it is “for us, and for our children,” for the rich and the poor, for the learned and the unlearned: The same duties are propounded to us all, under the same rewards, and the same penalties.

These things being duly considered, it appears that men resemble each other in the most important things; are children of the same earthly ancestor, of the same heavenly Father, and are brethren belonging to one and the same family.

I shall but just mention what I proposed,

Secondly, viz. That the divine impartiality, whatever difficulties may attend it in the present state, will be fully cleared up in the next; and sure I am, that if we at last attain happiness, though even with smart, and “through ‘the furnace of affliction’ here, we shall have no reason to complain.

The practical uses to be made of this doctrine are, briefly,

First, That, after adoring the great author and fountain of all good, and placing our whole confidence in him, we endeavour to imitate him

him in this perfection of his nature, and, like him, be "no respecter of persons."

It is indeed extremely difficult for man to be impartial; but we must endeavour to acquire this upright disposition: And as our passions in general are apt to lead us to unfairness and partiality in our conduct, we must by all means endeavour to divest ourselves of them; "always remembering, that with what measure we meet, it will be measured to us again;" and, "as we judge others, so likewise shall we ourselves be judged."

But further, what an encouragement is this to goodness, and to a constant perseverance therein; yea, even to an abundant degree!

For, as "God is no respecter of persons," then, from the essential perfection of his nature herein, he will hereafter (however, for wise reasons, things may go otherwise in the world) deal with every man according to his deserts, and consequently the meanest man, who deals uprightly, will be higher than the greatest monarch who deals unjustly; and the high, who are upright in their ways, will be as highly exalted.

In a word, what comfort and confidence may we draw to ourselves herefrom, well knowing, that in whatever state or circumstances we are, it is appointed us from the Almighty,

mighty, " who is no respecter of persons," and " whose desire is, that not any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life ;" and to this end hath disposed of each of us in such a rank and station, and affigned us such a share and portion of temporal happiness, as may best contribute to our eternal welfare.

What remains on our part is, thankfully to receive it, and to " do our duty in that state of life in which it hath pleased God to call us," not doubting but that in the end it will be with us, as it was with the children of Israel, viz. " He that had gathered much, had nothing over," nothing but what he must strictly account for ; " and he that had gathered little, had no lack ;" will have no deficiency, if he be but careful to improve that little.

For, God is no " severe master," " he reaps not where he has not sown, neither gathers where he has not strewn, but accepteth according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not :" yea,

" God is no respecter of persons," but " will render to every man according to his works," and " according to the fruits of his own doing."

[END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.]



ERRATA in VOL. I.

Page 16 in the Contents, for I. PET. i. 36. read I. PAT. i. 16
107, line 5, for *Prodence* read *Providence*
205 in the text, for PETER read I. PETER.

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